THE WIND AND THE RAIN

Founded by Michael Allmand

EDITED BY NEVILLE BRAYBROOKE

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THE WIND AND THE RAIN

Edited by NEVILLE BRAYBROOKE

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CONCUPISCENCE AND THE NOVEL

Pornography versus the Sanctity of the Flesh

GOLDEN OPINIONS are easily won in modern fiction. At their disposal, in 'the trade of literature', the large publishers have vast forces massed: their names are Sales Promotion, Publicity Gossip and Advertisers Licence. The last is the most subtle, the first the most pernicious. An exposure of the methods employed by these forces is long overdue, but the law of English libel makes it impossible. For instance, to expose a new and previously unparalleled form of Advertisers Licence which occured during the last six months, one has to resort to the language of the parable.

Late last autumn, Messrs. Tassle & Toe published a novel by an eminent public figure in the United States: the novel concerned a certain young man—a wealthy American—who became a Good Samaritan. An alternative title to the book might have been 'The Good Samaritan'. Despite good intentions, the result was uninspired and pedestrian, and one of the critics (recently elected to the ranks of the novel reviewers) wrote a notice of the book which, as this reviewer's name suggests, was somewhat icy. However, in the course of this notice the reviewer singled out an earlier book of the author's for praise—not a novel, but a personal record of impressions during the 'twenties. Messrs. Tassle & Toe, as their name suggests, were quick off the mark. Next week in the press the words 'The Good Samaritan' were sandwiched between the publishers's original blurb of the novel and the reviewer's random comment about the author's earlier book. The arrangement was as subtle as it was misleading: careful juxtaposition in the spacing, together with other typographical devices, were arranged so that the general reader might be led into believing that the review snippet referred to the novel just published. It was an extreme case of Advertisers Licence.

Sales Promotion cannot be explained in terms of a parable. Instead all that can be suggested in passing is that those interested in its pernicious practices should keep graphs of the different awards made each month by the different book clubs. Plotted over a course of a year, these graphs will show a favouritism towards certain publishers and authors which is, to say the least, suspicious; and this suspicion will be only further strengthened if a study is made of those pundits who are responsible for making these awards.

Now this triumvirate, Sales Promotion, Publicity Gossip (which is self-explanatory) and Advertisers Licence, has had the effect of *standardizing* the novel, of destroying the old conception of grades of achievement. Apart from *Scrutiny,* which on occasion has studied some of the golden opinions won by novelists like Virginia Woolf and Rex Warner, there is no other periodical to which a reader can turn

for consistent critical standards in the way that a nineteenth century reader might turn to *The Edinburgh, The Quarterly* or *Blackwood's*.[1]

Instead for criticism of the novel (which must also be a criticism of life) one is left with a handful of critics who have stayed the course; whose concern for standards in fiction has been a concern for standards in all human activity. One may name a few: F. R. Leavis, Martin Turnell, D. S. Savage, Derek Traversi and S. Gorley Putt. Of Mr. Leavis's great contribution to the analysis of the novel there is a study in this number and the other writers are critics who are already known to readers of this review. Yet the purpose of these introductory remarks is not so much to draw attention to the decline of critical standards and the decline of the novel—both are commonplaces—but to point to a tendency in the modern novel which, it would seem, Puritan modesty would have one overlook: the tendency towards pornography. This tendency once stated inevitably raises the much more serious problem of concupiscence and the novel. However, before passing directly to the major issue, there are certain criticisms which must be parried at the outset; and perhaps the best way to do this—lest one be accused of a partisan choice of material—is to concentrate upon novels which have been published in England during the past year.

Admittedly the charge of pornography is a strong one, but one makes it because it is precisely the public's charge which earlier this century was brought against such writers as Proust, Lawrence and Joyce. For pornography is one of the few things in literature which raises the costive sensibilities of the public to the formulation of some definite opinion. One saw a similar controversy over Norman Mailer's *The Naked and the Dead*[2] in 1949. Yet Mailer's book could only be described as pornography, as could much of Shakespeare and Cervantes (though this is not to equate Mailer with either of these writers), if words, sentences and paragraphs were taken out of their context. On the other hand, there are passages in the bulk of current fiction which, although broken down into words, sentences and paragraphs, could not be described as pornographic from a dictionary point of view are nothing other than unnecessary sexual peccadillos which are not essential to the plot: they add nothing to the integral design of the book and for this reason they are little more than veiled pornography. Here are two such examples. The first from *Evergreen* (1950) by Edward Holstius; the second from *My Time, My Life* (1950) by George Camden.

> We smoked cigarettes after our coffee and I noticed her nervous hands. She saw a wrinkle in her stockings and lifted her skirt discreetly. She smiled as she pulled each stocking up. 'You're learning things you didn't know. I keep my stockings up with a ha'penny'.

[1] In America to-day there is *The Sewanee Review* and *Kenyon Review*—both deserving serious attention.

[2] For a review of this book, see Volume VI, No. 2.

'God, I miss you, Pat!'
She looks at me, giving me her all in her eyes.
'I miss you, Bill!'
Gently I let my hands wander all over her.
'Bill, there's people around!'
I kiss her into silence.
'What will baby say to us wicked parents', Pat murmurs.
'Why, darling, she'll say: "Go on enjoying yourself, and make me a little brother".'
'Bill! You wouldn't dare.'
'Of course not, sweetheart', I whispered. 'You know I'm careful'.

The two passages are representative: they add nothing to the development of the characters in question, their aim being to titillate the reader; to pepper a *standardized* dish. Nevertheless it must not be thought that this leader is a plea that the novel should never enter the precincts of the bedroom. A novelist should always be capable of writing as both a husband and a father and whether in actual fact he is either is immaterial: in his imagination he must know what it is to be a husband and father as he must also know what it is to be a wife and mother; and such feats are not beyond creative genius.[3] They are not beyond François Mauriac when he is writing at his most inspired and it is for this reason that it is proposed for the remainder of this leader to single out two of his short *contes* which were translated by Gerard Hopkins last year. They are relevant to the main argument, for both *The Desert of Love* (originally published in 1925) and *The Enemy* (originally published in 1935) are studies of concupiscence. Indeed from the beginning of his career this has been a favourite theme with Mauriac, and in all his novels save one it has been the main theme. That one exception is his last novel, *The Woman of the Pharisees,* where the predominant theme is spiritual pride.

Mauriac's novels have met with many strictures, for many different reasons and from many different quarters. A French Communist describes Mauriac as 'a great writer in bondage who cannot escape his Catholicism'. The Abbé Calvet, explaining Mauriac's omission from *Le Renouveau Catholique,* dismisses him as 'a Catholic and a writer but not a Catholic writer'. Dr. E. C. Messenger in his book, *Two in One Flesh* (1949)[4], brings this charge against him:

> Matters are not helped by the treatment of sex found in novelists such as François Mauriac, who in his *Thérèse* makes his heroine speak of 'the indelible filth' of her wedded life . . . and 'the irremediable outrage to which her innocent body would have to submit' on her wedding night. . . etc. Mauriac in his Foreword says that he himself knows 'the secrets of the hearts that are deep bound in, and mingled with the filth of flesh'.

[3] Without making extravagant claims, two new novelists above the common rut are Doris Lessing and Truman Capote. Yet in the former's book, *The Grass is Singing* (1950) the chief male character is the most convincing and Mr. Capote's women are much better portrayed than his men—*A Tree of Night* (1950). In each book, in the case of their own sex, the imaginative effort to create a character has been less than whole-hearted, suggesting a certain lack of exertion on the part of the writer or rather too casual an acceptance of the members of one's own sex.

[4] Part I: *Introduction to Sex and Marriage.*

It is this last condemnation which is the most serious, although the most easy to answer—at least in this case.

Dr. Messenger confuses the particular with the general. Thérèse Desqueyroux is one woman, a particular case in point: she is not intended to be a symbol of womanhood, any more than is Mrs. Proudie intended to be a general symbol of all archdeacons' wives. The real challenge lies elsewhere.

Neither *The Desert of Love* nor *The Enemy* are masterpieces; but they both show the hand of the master novelist. Here are two such examples, one from each book.

> Leaning over the naked breast whose veiled loveliness had once made him tremble, [the doctor] listened to her heart, then, very gently touching her injured forehead with his finger, he traced the extent of the wound. 'Does it hurt you here . . . or here . . . or here?' She complained, too, of pain on her hip. Very carefully he drew down the sheet so as to expose no more than the small bruised surface; then covered it up again. With his eyes on his watch, he felt her pulse. The body had been delivered to him for cure, not possession. His eyes knew that they were there to observe, not to be enchanted. He gazed intently at her flesh, bringing all his intelligence to bear. The clearness of his mind barred all roads of approach to his melancholy passion.
>
> He found a glory in realizing that he had no need to protect his love from his muddied thoughts of yesterday. He revelled in the knowledge, quite forgetting that, thanks to physical ecstasies still recent, the demon in him was temporarily sated.

In each passage a moral is made, but it is made in such a way that it is an integral part of the plot: the moral in no way slows up the action, because it is woven into the plot as an observation following as naturally as day must follow night—or so it seems to the reader. In fact this analogy of day and night is particularly apt, because when a true marriage of moral and observation is achieved, the reader becomes *enlightened;* he is given a new and deeper understanding of the significance of life; he is less in the dark. With Mauriac, as with the great novelist, these new and sudden understandings of life's mysteries are a recurring factor in their writing; it is the same with Homer and Shakespeare and at this point a comparison may be useful. In the *Odyssey* the chapter on Calypso ends thus: 'And now Athene filled Odysseus's eyes with sleep and sealed their lids—the surest way to relieve the exhaustion caused by so much toil.'[5] In *The Rape of Lucrece* there occur these lines:

> . . . he sets his foot upon the light,
> For light and lust are deadly enemies; . . .

Wrenched from their contexts, these Homeric and Shakespearean comments appear bald: but in their contexts they appear less as statements than asides to the reader—asides brimful with both a meaning and warning whose full significance a reader can only fully grasp upon a second or third reading; and it is the same with Mauriac. It is as if all the time the reader were being daggered; being pierced by the truth of universal reactions which, once underlined for him, he recognizes as

[5] E. V. Rieu's translation.

his own. So it is when Mauriac writes at his best one undergoes a cleansing similar to that *katharsis* which Greek and Elizabethan tragedy evokes: the source is purified.

Yet to admit this cleansing is not to declare that temptation is banished: in itself it remains as powerful as before, save that in so much as one has a greater understanding and knowledge of it, then to this extent one is better equipped in the future for fighting it. That is all. Novels, like those of Mauriac, in which concupiscence is the main theme give passion its full range, because in life everything serves as fuel for passion: abstinence sharpens it, repletion strengthens it, virtue irritates it.[6]

One may recall Mauriac's reply to Lefèvre who had suggested that Mauriac's books attached too much importance to the flesh. (It is also worth noting that the same criticisms were made of Lawrence's books and that such criticisms, as in the case of Mauriac, came from both Communist and Catholic sources alike). Mauriac replied to Lefèvre that because most of the younger generation treated the role of the flesh as any other fact it had lost all dramatic value; it had ceased to have anything mysterious about it.

For Mauriac's generation was not born under the sign of Balzac: it was born under the sign of Proust and Freud and it is inevitable therefore that as a modern novelist he writes about people and a generation which are still recoiling from both the impact of Freud's psychological pronouncements and Proust's limited concept of time and history. Indeed as Mauriac said as early as 1923: 'By presenting creatures entirely deprived of a religious life I will show the great emptiness of souls—an emptiness especially notable among women'.

Now the very frank and straightforward terms in which Mauriac set down his *apologia* have had many false constructions put upon them during the last three decades: even worse still, the work which has flowed out of such an *apologia* has been accused of giving scandal, of being harmful to both faith and morals. (Again charges also brought against Lawrence). In turn Mauriac has been condemned of being a Jansenist, a Manichæan and a sensualist; and they are charges with their grain of truth, since as was said earlier, although Mauriac is a master novelist, not all of his novels are masterpieces. Certainly there are indications that he is a Jansenist by tradition, if not by belief; that he is prey to a form of Manichæanism in his emphasis on evil; that at times he permits his analysis of human emotions to proceed unrestrainedly without due regard to the sensitivity of the Christian conscience.[7] These are faults, errors in judgment, which are Mauriac's failings as a thinker as much as they are his failings as a novelist. For all these characteristics—his Jansenism, Manichæanism and sensualism

[6] Along these lines an interesting comparison and contrast could be made between Stendhal and Mauriac.

[7] See 'François Mauriac and the Literary Conscience' by Thomas F. Gilligan in *Perspective* (U.S.A.), Vol. II, No. 2. This short article is one of the best studies of Mauriac that has yet appeared.

—can be adduced from a reading of his books without any personal knowledge of the author being necessary. And this is so because there is tendency for Mauriac to step out of the realms of fiction, to take the reader into his confidence and to give him an insight into some of the dilemmas and problems of technique facing the writer. Of this weakness, the last sentence in *The Enemy* is a good example. '. . . Grace? It is the mark of our slavery and of our wretchedness that we can, without lying, paint a faithful portrait only of the passions.' When he resorts to this method his work loses conviction: it becomes didactic rather than dramatic; and pithy as indeed some of these observations are, they are out of place and would be better relegated to an author's journal. For instance, in the case of the one just cited from *The Enemy,* it comes as an anti-climax and consequently detracts in the total effect from some of the previous observations which, absorbed naturally into the plot, have appeared as *integrated* factors of the main story. There is none of the subtlety which is to be found in the other two passages from this double volume that have already been quoted: in fact, by comparison, this last example lacks that cleansing quality which is to be found in the others: it is impersonal and, like water off a duck's back, it glances off as soon as the book is closed. The transition from one medium to another has been too sharp for a harmonius effect to be achieved: instead the reader is temporarily marooned between drama and dogma.

This excursion into style and technique has been intentional. A true artist cannot rely upon a pietistic *deus ex machina;* upon a sudden conversion, or the improbable abandonment of the loose habits of a lifetime. If such changes are to take place they must be psychologically conditioned changes; they must have an air of likelihood about them. A formula mechanically employed is worse than useless, because it is the artist's function to re-create living experience; and because life to-day in any large city gives such emphasis to sex, it is natural that sex will play a large role in any modern novel. To neglect it would be to exchange the real world for the world of swaddling clothes; to see men and women as from the prison of a cot, in which the bars obscure the vision. On the contrary, the artist or novelist who sees life as it is, can also see life as *it could be.*

When Doctor Courrèges bends over his adored who is also his patient (in *The Desert of Love*) it is as a man of science and not as a lover. In such a medical duty, even in the case of his beloved, passion is something apart: for the duration of his medical visit concupiscence remains a dead thing; and it is a tribute to Mauriac's craftsmanship that he is able to induce a similar feeling in the reader, though it is an even greater tribute to his mastery of style and technique that his writing in this chapter is so taut that it carries along with it a number of corollaries—corollaries that automatically flow out of this scene. One is made aware of something more than Doctor Courrèges's purely scientific approach to Maria Cross's body. One is made aware of modesty itself; of that unfathomable *sapientia* in which love is locked

away and wherein resides the mystery of woman. Love alone may strip itself bare and any other nakedness must perforce be a betrayal of love; to accept this is to assign to the flesh its true importance and sanctity. As Mauriac has said it is not something to be reckoned on a purely human level, a fact to be discussed 'like any other fact': it is something sacred, quite literally, something holy—the sacrament of Holy Matrimony. So it is when love is betrayed, each betrayal is a further emptying of the soul (which is precisely what Mauriac aims at showing). He does not attempt to embroider life; to give a picture of human bliss. Far from it: his picture is bleak and stark—a case of knowing oneself to the pitch of being horrified, with concupiscence all the time nudging its way in at every turn. Perhaps then, these two extracts taken from different parts of *The Desert of Love*, state as lucidly as anything which he has ever written, his attitude to the problem, and joined together they not only state the problem, but resolve it.

> 'No, not passions, one single passion It goes on inside us, and from a casual meeting, from the eyes and lips of some perfect stranger, we build up something that corresponds with it. . . Only by physical, by the embraces of the flesh, by, in short, the sexual act, can two persons ever really communicate. . . But we know only too well where that road leads, and why it was traced—for the sole purpose of continuing the species, as you would put it, doctor. We choose the one path open to us, but it was never designed to lead us to our heart's desire.'

> There could be no hope for either of them . . . unless, before they died, He should reveal Himself, Who, unknown to them, had drawn and summoned from the depths of their beings this burning, bitter tide.'

After this understanding, there can be no other.

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MID-WAY, MID-CENTURY

For those who were children in the first World War

SYDNEY TREMAYNE

I

The clouds have sucked the mountains into the sky:
The light is lead and silver over the sea.
Sit still and let the slant rain steal your wits.
Gulls shall cry all that signifies when thoughts
Settle and cease and let the slow world be.
The grey waves swell and vanish: the tides flow
Steadily past the headland's lidless eye
That watched the fishing fleets and navies by.
Half-rotten birches, stumbling in the scree
Against the steep, mimic your history.
The cloud obscures: so quickly one forgets
The impact and the fury. Tangle floats
At tide's edge and the gulls fly into the wind.
The story has no beginning and no end.

Half-way and changed, even the landscape fused
In pattern of alien landscapes superimposed,
One hoards a patched world homespun in the past.
Landscape disturbs acutely. Why does place
Remain more actual than any face?
Why are the stone house and the river's mouth
At the heart of this and every moment's death?
I searched the days to find the earliest light
That laughed at the sea's edge when the turf was bright,
But a fat rook, rocked on a treetop, mocked at men.

The spring tide runs, a wet wind rends the pines,
The black ships groan at their moorings. The wind stuns.
The sea rears over the roads and sucks back stones,
Blind as the groping of the blundering guns.
Those guns that rocked our cradles wrenched the world.
Oh what an outraged, innocent anger hurled
Its blame at the politicians and the generals.
Little we knew, but learned the feeling of funerals:
Drooped heads, drooped poppy heads, the hammering heart
In the ceremonial silence. God our help.
Stone hands; reversed stone rifles. Ages past.

Moving beyond a war to another war
Down a green avenue, we saw the briars

Twist into human forms that crouched by walls,
Gnarled hands on knees, or leaned at tattered corners.
From the sterility of gutters, gleaners
Turned their slow faces to avoid our gaze.
We saw where we came by the hunger of their eyes
And a poster for a Mediterranean cruise.
Destruction obsessed us—until the flood broke in.
Suddenly the shrill orators were dumb
And each man with his ignorance was alone.

II

That's the convention, rough and unsatisfactory.
Already it wears the blear grey face of history.
The young men will be bored with it, ourselves
Shall not reach down the reference from the shelves
For the heart beats in response to no written story
Movements in history, struggle of men with events,
The common denominator of discontents,
The fanatical misconceptions, the angers drained
By the bleeding of many seasons into the ground—
These things distract their moment: what remains
Is the old, blind force of love to escape its bounds.

For love is that more than self which each desires,
The constructive loneliness whose reach aspires
Even beyond self's death to be not apart,
To be part, to be relative, to have peace of heart,
To be whole in the gift of all. But do not ask
The thing you know already or will know.
The truth is infinite and not to show.

Yet Belsen burning, Auschwitz, Buchenwald,
The perverted face, the howling against the bars?
Collapse is human also. Love repelled
Writes in the torturer's blood across the walls.

Babylon broken, Sparta overcome,
Only a tale of Troy, and Minos dumb.
The burnt grass and the gorse have passed their bloom.

The track goes winding upward. It is noon.
The skylarks and the raven in the sun
Watch the brief shadow jerk across a stone.
Under the grass the sounds of water run;
The tarn assimilates the trickling flame.
The first world too is valid. Where the sea
Rocks through the tops of trees below, I know
The stone house and the river's mouth that lie

At the heart of this and every moment's joy.
But joy is derogation. Roots go down
To that black vortex whence the world is born;
The light grows tall and still through flesh and stone.

III

Half-way and changed, the century's youth outrun,
And there is no returning. We shall learn
No doubt to expect no respite in our time.
We had not much to mourn before the flame
Hissed our wild words to silence: that time's stress
Seems in this retrospect to be no loss.
Yet through our private histories we moved
Richly as all the ages in our loves:
Struck through the broken promise of the days
Let that one shaft of golden light compose,
As in a sordid street, some air of grace.

Where shall we march to the pipe of enlightened self-interest
Who are self-sick, sick of marching, sick with thirst
For the unpolluted streams, the shining waters?
Shall the water flow from the rock, from the parched bomb craters,
And the rose burst into the light, and the blind have sight,
And the hungry provide for the multitude to eat?

In city streets hostilities collide
And each thrusts on alone amongst the crowd.
World is so much within us, it is hard
For love to be ever more than a private word.
But here we are; we live here; it is home,
The spirit's slum, the place we turn away from.
It is always here; it has been here a long time
And used to be worse than this before the bomb
Opened up half the street: so now the sky
Moves opposite the houses night and day
And sun and moon and rain come slanting in.
So frail a city. Washing on a line
Has all the ephemeral poignancy of leaves.
I do not think the crippled girl believes
That there will be a lover, though she sings.

Babylon broken, Sparta overcome,
Only a tale of Troy, and Minos dumb.
The light grows tall and still through earth and bone.

IV

Dark sharpens day, and centuries in the blood
Swing to the living moment of their need.

Never was light more beautiful or swift.
Time has not played us false though the wind shift
And Scylla and Charybdis guard the fleece
Though even age possess no spell of peace,
And all our gold sea-glitter and sundrift.

White oars in crimson waters, a red sun:
A carrion Napoleon, upside down.
We have heard enough of heroes; not that way.
Medea's magic fails, but still the slow,
The patient coral building in the wave
Raises both reef to wreck and isle to save.
We steer toward the narrows, and winds blow.

VILLATIC FOWL

Why do I feel, God, this surprise
At finding you in a chicken's eyes?
By the swung jaw and leg of a lion
I know your will, I sense your iron;
The elephant can inculcate
Your gentle bulk, your docile weight;
In the giraffe's flung neck I heed
The tangent of your boundless need;
Your Law's great scorn of laws I know
In lobsters, lice, and the cosmic flow:
Only the commonplace intrudes
Between you, Breeder, and your broods;
But when familiar things grow strange
We gape at your still point, your range,
Marking the parallax that lies
Between you, say, and a pullet's eyes,
Noticing older, wiser scruples
In the sharp blink of her shuttered pupils,
And a more tragic care that lances
From the flint of her quick glances. . . .

Or is it my love-and-guilt which traces
You to such small impossible places?

W. H. GARDNER

THE ILIAD

Or, The Poem of Force

SIMONE WEIL

THE true hero, the true subject, the centre of the *Iliad* is force. Force employed by man, force that enslaves man, force before which man's flesh shrinks away. In this work, at all times, the human spirit is shown as modified by its relations with force, as swept away, blinded, by the very force it imagined it could handle, as deformed by the weight of the force it submits to. For those dreamers who considered that force, thanks to progress, would soon be a thing of the past, the *Iliad* could appear as an historical document; for others, whose powers of recognition are more acute and who perceive force, to-day as yesterday, at the very centre of human history, the *Iliad* is the purest and the loveliest of mirrors.

To define force—it is that *x* that turns anybody who is subjected to it into a *thing*. Exercised to the limit, it turns man into a thing in the most literal sense: it makes a corpse out of him. Somebody was here, and the next minute there is nobody here at all; this is a spectacle the *Iliad* never wearies of showing us:

> . . . the horses
> Rattled the empty chariots through the files of battle,
> Longing for their noble drivers. But they on the ground
> Lay, dearer to the vultures than to their wives.

The hero becomes a *thing* dragged behind a chariot in the dust:

> All around, his black hair
> Was spread; in the dust his whole head lay,
> That once-charming head; now Zeus had let his enemies
> Defile it on his native soil.

The bitterness of such a spectacle is offered us absolutely undiluted. No comforting fiction intervenes; no consoling prospect of immortality; and on the hero's head no washed-out halo of patriotism descends.

> His soul, fleeing his limbs, passed to Hades,
> Mourning its fate, forsaking its youth and its vigour.

Still more poignant—so painful is the contrast—is the sudden evocation, as quickly rubbed out, of another world: the far-away, precarious, touching world of peace, of the family, the world in which each man counts more than anything else to those about him.

> She ordered her bright-haired maids in the palace
> To place on the fire a large tripod, preparing
> A hot bath for Hector, returning from battle.
> Foolish woman! Already he lay, far from hot baths,
> Slain by grey-eyed Athena, who guided Achilles's arm.

Far from hot baths he was indeed, poor man. And not he alone. Nearly all the *Iliad* takes place far from hot baths. Nearly all of human life, then and now. takes place far from hot baths.

Here we see force in its grossest and most summary form—the force that kills. How much more varied in its processes, how much more surprising in its effects is the other force, the force that does *not* kill, i.e., that does not kill just yet. It will surely kill, it will possibly kill, or perhaps it merely hangs, poised and ready, over the head of the creature it *can* kill, at any moment, which is to say at every moment. In whatever aspect, its effect is the same: it turns a man into a stone. From its first property (the ability to turn a human being into a thing by the simple method of killing him) flows another, quite prodigious too in its own way, the ability to turn a human being into a thing while he is still alive. He is alive; he has a soul; and yet —he is a thing. An extraordinary entity this—a thing that has a soul. And as for the soul, what an extraordinary house it finds itself in! Who can say what it costs it, moment by moment, to accommodate itself to this residence, how much writhing and bending, folding and pleating are required of it? It was not made to live inside a thing; if it does so, under pressure of necessity, there is not a single element of its nature to which violence is not done.

A man stands disarmed and naked with a weapon pointing at him; this person becomes a corpse before anybody or anything touches him. Just a minute ago, he was thinking, acting, hoping:

> Motionless, he pondered. And the other drew near,
> Terrified, anxious to touch his knees, hoping in his heart
> To escape evil death and black destiny . . .
> With one hand he clasped, suppliant, his knees,
> While the other clung to the sharp spear, not letting go . . .

Soon, however, he grasps the fact that the weapon which is pointing at him will not be diverted; and now, still breathing, he is simply matter; still thinking, he can think no longer:

> Thus spoke the brilliant son of Priam
> In begging words. But he heard a harsh reply:
> He spoke. And the other's knees and heart failed him.
> Dropping his spear, he knelt down, holding out his arms.
> Achilles, drawing his sharp sword, struck
> Through the neck and breastbone. The two-edged sword
> Sunk home its full length. The other, face down,
> Lay still, and the black blood ran out, wetting the ground.

* * *

If a stranger, completely disabled, disarmed, strengthless, throws himself on the mercy of a warrior, he is not, by this very act, condemned to death; but a moment of impatience on the warrior's part will suffice to relieve him of his life. In any case, his flesh has lost that very important property which in the laboratory distinguishes living flesh from dead—the galvanic response. If you give a frog's leg an electric shock, it twitches. If you confront a human being with the touch or sight of something horrible or terrifying, this bundle of muscles, nerves, and flesh likewise twitches. Alone of all living things, the suppliant we have just described neither quivers nor trembles. He has lost the right to do so. As his lips advance to touch

the object that is for him of all things most charged with horror, they do not draw back on his teeth—they cannot:

> No one saw great Priam enter. He stopped,
> Clasped the knees of Achilles, kissed his hands,
> Those terrible man-killing hands that had slaughtered so many of his sons.

The sight of a human being pushed to such an extreme of suffering chills us like the sight of a dead body:

> As when harsh misfortune strikes a man if in his own country
> He has killed a man, and arrives at last at someone else's door,
> The door of a rich man; a shudder seizes those who see him.
> So Achilles shuddered to see divine Priam;
> The others shuddered too, looking one at the other.

But this feeling lasts only a moment. Soon the very presence of the suffering creature is forgotten:

> He spoke. The other, remembering his own father, longed to weep;
> Taking the old man's arm, he pushed him away.
> Both were remembering. Thinking of Hector, killer of men,
> Priam wept, abased at the feet of Achilles.
> But Achilles wept, now for his father,
> Now for Patroclus. And their sobs resounded through the house.

It was not insensibility that made Achilles with a single movement of his hand push away the old man who had been clinging to his knees; Priam's words, recalling his own old father, had moved him to tears. It was merely a question of his being as free in his attitudes and movements as if, clasping his knees, there were not a suppliant but an inert object. Anybody who is in our vicinity exercises a certain power over us by his very presence, and a power that belongs to him alone, that is, the power of halting, repressing, modifying each movement that our body sketches out. If we step aside for a passer-by on the road, it is not the same thing as stepping aside to avoid a billboard; alone in our rooms, we get up, walk about, sit down again quite differently from the way we do when we have a visitor. But this indefinable influence that the presence of another human being has on us is not exercised by men whom a moment of impatience can deprive of life, who can die before even thought has a chance to pass sentence on them. In their presence, people move about as if they were not there; they, on their side, running the risk of being reduced to nothing in a single instant, imitate nothingness in their own persons. Pushed, they fall. Fallen, they lie where they are, unless chance gives somebody the idea of raising them up again. But supposing that at long last they have been picked up, honoured with cordial remarks, they still do not venture to take this resurrection seriously; they dare not express a wish lest an irritated voice return them forever to silence:

> He spoke; the old man trembled and obeyed.

* * *

At least a suppliant, once his prayer is answered, becomes a human being again, like everybody else. But there are other, more unfor-

tunate creatures who have become things for the rest of their lives. Their days hold no pastimes, no free spaces, no room in them for any impulse of their own. It is not that their life is harder than other men's nor that they occupy a lower place in the social hierarchy; no, they are another human species, a compromise between a man and a corpse. The idea of a person's being a thing is a logical contradiction. Yet what is impossible in logic becomes true in life, and the contradiction lodged within the soul tears it to shreds. This thing is constantly aspiring to be a man or a woman, and never achieving it—here, surely, is death but death strung out over a whole lifetime; here, surely, is life, but life that death congeals before abolishing.

This strange fate awaits the virgin, the priest's daughter:

> I will not give her up. Sooner shall old age come upon her
> In our house in Argos, far from her native land,
> Tending the loom and sharing my bed.

It awaits the young wife, the young mother, the prince's bride:

> And perhaps one day, in Argos, you will weave cloth for another,
> And the Messeian or Hyperian water you will fetch,
> Much against your will, yielding to a harsh necessity.

It awaits the baby, heir to the royal sceptre.

> Soon they will be carried off in the hollow ships,
> I with them. And you, my child, will either go with me,
> To a land where you will work at wretched tasks,
> Labouring for a pitiless master. . . .

In the mother's eyes, such a fate is, for her child, as terrible as death; the husband would rather die than see his wife reduced to it; all the plagues of heaven are invoked by the father against the army that subjects his daughter to it. Yet the victims themselves are beyond all this. Curses, feelings of rebellion, comparisons, reflections on the future and the past, are obliterated from the mind of the captive; and memory itself barely lingers on. Fidelity to his city and his dead is not the slave's privilege.

And what does it take to make the slave weep? The misfortune of his master, his oppressor, despoiler, pillager, of the man who laid waste his town and killed his dear ones under his very eyes. This man suffers or dies; *then* the slave's tears come. And really why not? This is for him the only occasion on which tears are permitted, are, indeed, required. A slave will always cry whenever he can do so with impunity—his situation keeps tears on tap for him.

> She spoke, weeping, and the women groaned,
> Using the pretext of Patroclus to bewail their own torments.

Since the slave has no license to express anything except what is pleasing to his master, it follows that the only emotion that can touch or enliven him a little, that can reach him in the desolation of his life, is the emotion of love for his master. There is no place else to send the gift of love; all other outlets are barred, just as, with the horse in harness, bit, shafts, reins bar every way but one. And if, by some miracle, in the slave's breast a hope is born, the hope of becoming, some day, through somebody's influence, *someone* once again, how far will these not go to show love and thankfulness, even

though these emotions are addressed to the very men who should, considering the very recent past, still reek with horror for them:

> My husband, to whom my father and respected mother gave me,
> I saw before the city transfixed by the sharp bronze.
> My three brothers, children, with me, of a single mother,
> So dear to me! They all met their fatal day.
> But you did not allow me to weep, when swift Achilles
> Slaughtered my husband and laid waste the city of Mynes.
> You promised me that I would be taken by divine Achilles,
> For his legitimate wife, that he would carry me away in his ships,
> To Pythia, where our marriage would be celebrated among the Myrmidons,
> So without respite I mourn for you, you who have always been gentle.

To lose more than the slave does is impossible, for he loses his whole inner life. A fragment of it he may get back if he sees the possibility of changing his fate, but this is his only hope. Such is the empire of force, as extensive as the empire of nature. Nature, too, when vital needs are at stake, can erase the whole inner life, even the grief of a mother:

> But the thought of eating came to her, when she was tired of tears.

* * *

Force, in the hands of another, exercises over the soul the same tyranny that extreme hunger does; for it possesses, and *in perpetuo*, the power of life and death. Its rule, moreover, is as cold and hard as the rule of inert matter. The man who knows himself weaker than another is more alone in the heart of a city than a man lost in the desert.

> Two casks are placed before Zeus's door-sill,
> Containing the gifts he gives, the bad in one, the good in the other . . .
> The man to whom he gives baneful gifts, he exposes to outrage;
> A frightful need drives him across the divine earth;
> He is a wanderer, and gets no respect from gods or men.

Force is as pitiless to the man who possesses it, or thinks he does, as it is to its victims; the second it crushes, the first it intoxicates. The truth is, nobody really possesses it. The human race is not divided up, in the *Iliad,* into conquered persons, slaves, suppliants, on the one hand, and conquerors and chiefs on the other. In this poem there is not a single man who does not at one time or another have to bow his neck to force. The common soldier in the *Iliad* is free and has the right to bear arms; nevertheless he is subject to the indignity of orders and abuse:

> But whenever he came upon a commoner shouting out,
> He struck him with his sceptre and spoke sharply:
> 'Good for nothing! Be still and listen to your betters,
> You are weak and cowardly and unwarlike,
> You count for nothing, neither in battle nor in council.'

Thersites pays dear for the perfectly reasonable comments he makes, comments not at all different, moreover, from those made by Achilles:

> He hit him with his sceptre on back and shoulders,
> So that he doubled over, and a great tear welled up,
> And a bloody welt appeared on his back
> Under the golden sceptre. Frightened, he sat down,
> Wiping away his tears, bewildered and in pain.
> Troubled though they were, the others laughed long at him.

Achilles himself, that proud hero, the undefeated, is shown us at the outset of the poem, weeping with humiliation and helpless grief—the woman he wanted for his bride has been taken from under his nose, and he has not dared to oppose it:

> . . . But Achilles
> Weeping, sat apart from his companions,
> By the white-capped waves, staring over the boundless ocean.

What has happened is that Agamemnon has deliberately humiliated Achilles, to show that he himself is the master:

> . . . So you will learn
> That I am greater than you, and anyone else will hesitate
> To treat me as an equal and set himself against me.

But a few days pass, and now the supreme commander is weeping in his turn. He must humble himself, he must plead, and have, moreover, the added misery of doing it all in vain.

In the same way, there is not a single one of the combatants who is spared the shameful experience of fear. The heroes quake like everybody else. It only needs a challenge from Hector to throw the whole Greek force into consternation—except for Achilles and his men, and they did not happen to be present:

> He spoke and all grew still and held their peace,
> Ashamed to refuse, afraid to accept.

But once Ajax comes forward and offers himself, fear quickly changes sides:

> A shudder of terror ran through the Trojans, making their limbs weak;
> And Hector himself felt his heart leap in his breast.
> But he no longer had the right to tremble, or to run away. . . .

Two days later, it is Ajax's turn to be terrified:

> Zeus the father on high, makes fear rise in Ajax.
> He stops, overcome, puts behind him his buckler made of seven hides,
> Trembles, looks at the crowd around, like a wild beast. . . .

Even to Achilles the moment comes; he too must shake and stammer with fear, though it is a river that has this effect on him, not a man. But, with the exception of Achilles, every man in *The Iliad* tastes a moment of defeat in battle. Victory is less a matter of valour than of blind destiny, which is symbolized in the poem by Zeus's golden scales:

> Then Zeus the father took his golden scales,
> In them he put the two fates of death that cuts down all men,
> One for the Trojans, tamers of horses, one for the bronze-sheathed Greeks.
> He seized the scales by the middle; it was the fatal day of Greece that sank.

By its very blindness, destiny establishes a kind of justice. Blind also is she who decrees to warriors punishment in kind. He that takes the sword, will perish by the sword. The *Iliad* formulated the principle long before the Gospels did, and in almost the same terms:

> Ares is just, and kills those who kill.

* * *

Perhaps all men, by the very act of being born, are destined to suffer violence; yet this is a truth to which circumstance shuts men's eyes. The strong are, as a matter of fact, never absolutely strong,

nor are the weak absolutely weak, but neither is aware of this. They have in common a refusal to believe that they both belong to the same species: the weak see no relation between themselves and the strong, and vice versa. The man who is the possessor of force seems to walk through a non-resistant element; in the human substance that surrounds him nothing has the power to interpose, between the impulse and the act, the tiny interval that is reflection. Where there is no room for reflection, there is none either for justice or prudence. Hence we see men in arms behaving harshly and madly. We see their sword bury itself in the breast of a disarmed enemy who is in the very act of pleading at their knees. We see them triumph over a dying man by describing to him the outrages his corpse will endure. We see Achilles cut the throats of twelve Trojan boys on the funeral pyre of Patroclus as naturally as we cut flowers for a grave. These men, wielding power, have no suspicion of the fact that the consequences of their deeds will at length come home to them—they too will bow the neck in their turn. If you can make an old man fall silent, tremble, obey, with a single word of your own, why should it occur to you that the curses of this old man, who is after all a priest, will have their own importance in the gods' eyes? Why should you refrain from taking Achilles's girl away from him if you know that neither he nor she can do anything but obey you? Achilles rejoices over the sight of the Greeks fleeing in misery and confusion. What could possibly suggest to him that this rout, which will last exactly as long as he wants it to and end when his mood indicates it, that this very rout will be the cause of his friend's death, and, for that matter, of his own? Thus it happens that those who have force on loan from fate count on it too much and are destroyed.

But at the time their own destruction seems impossible to them. For they do not see that the force in their possession is only a limited quantity; nor do they see their relations with other human beings as a kind of balance between unequal amounts of force. Since other people do not impose on their movements that halt, that interval of hesitation, wherein lies all our consideration for our brothers in humanity, they conclude that destiny has given complete license to them, and none at all to their inferiors. And at this point they exceed the measure of the force that is actually at their disposal. Inevitably they exceed it, since they are not aware that it is limited. And now we see them committed irretrievably to chance; suddenly things cease to obey them. Sometimes chance is kind to them, sometimes cruel. But in any case there they are, exposed, open to misfortune; gone is the armour of power that formerly protected their naked souls; nothing, no shield, stands between them and tears.

This retribution, which has a geometrical rigour, which operates automatically to penalize the abuse of force, was the main subject of Greek thought. It is the soul of the epic. Under the name of Nemesis, it functions as the mainspring of Aeschylus's tragedies. To the Pythagoreans, to Socrates and Plato, it was the jumping-off point of specu-

lation upon the nature of man and the universe. Wherever Hellenism has penetrated, we find the idea of it familiar. In Oriental countries which are steeped in Buddhism, it is perhaps this Greek idea that has lived on under the name of Kharma. The Occident, however, has lost it, and no longer even has a word to express it in any of its languages: conceptions of limit, measure, equilibrium, which ought to determine the conduct of life are, in the West, restricted to a servile function in the vocabulary of technics. We are only geometricians of matter; the Greeks were, first of all, geometricians in their apprenticeship to virtue.

* * *

The progress of the war in the *Iliad* is simply a continual game of seesaw. The victor of the moment feels himself invincible, even though, only a few hours before, he may have experienced defeat; he forgets to treat victory as a transitory thing. At the end of the first day of combat described in the *Iliad,* the victorious Greeks were in a position to obtain the object of all their efforts, i.e., Helen and her riches—assuming of course as Homer did, that the Greeks had reason to believe that Helen was in Troy. Actually, the Egyptian priests, who ought to have known, affirmed later on to Herodotus that she was in Egypt. In any case, that evening the Greeks are no longer interested in her or her possessions:

> 'For the present, let us not accept the riches of Paris;
> Nor Helen; everybody sees, even the most ignorant,
> That Troy stands on the verge of ruin.'
> He spoke, and all the Achaians acclaimed him.

What they want is, in fact, everything. For booty, all the riches of Troy; for their bonfires, all the palaces, temples, houses; for slaves, all the women and children; for corpses, all the men. They forget one detail, that *everything* is not within their power, for they are not in Troy. Perhaps they will be there to-morrow; perhaps not. Hector, the same day, makes the same mistake:

> For I know well in my entrails and in my heart,
> A day will come when Holy Troy will perish,
> And Priam, and the nation of Priam of the good lance.
> But I think less of the grief that is in store for the Trojans,
> And of Hecuba herself, and of Priam the king,
> And of my brothers, so numerous and so brave,
> Who will fall in the dust under the blows of the enemy,
> Than of you that day when a Greek in his bronze breastplate
> Will drag you away weeping and deprive you of your liberty.
>
> But as for me, may I be dead, and may the earth have covered me
> Before I hear you cry out or see you dragged away!

At this moment what would he not give to turn aside those horrors which he believes to be inevitable? But at this moment nothing he *could* give would be of any use. The next day but one, however, the Greeks have run away miserably, and Agamemnon himself is in favour of putting to the sea again. And now Hector, by making a very few concessions, could readily secure the enemy's departure; yet now he is even unwilling to let them go empty-handed:

Set fires everywhere and let the brightness mount the skies
Lest in the night the long-haired Greeks,
Escaping, sail over the broad back of ocean. . . .
Let each of them take home a wound to heal . . . thus others will fear
To bring dolorous war to the Trojans, tamers of horses.

His wish is granted; the Greeks stay; and the next day they reduce Hector and his men to a pitiable condition:

As for them—they fled across the plain like cattle
Whom a lion hunts before him in the dark midnight. . . .
Thus the mighty Agamemnon, son of Atreus, pursued them,
Steadily killing the hindmost; and still they fled.

In the course of the afternoon, Hector regains the ascendancy, withdraws again, then puts the Greeks to flight, then is repulsed by Patroclus, who has come in with his fresh troops. Patroclus, pressing his advantage, ends by finding himself exposed, wounded and without armour, to the sword of Hector. And finally that evening the victorious Hector hears the prudent counsel of Polydamas and repudiates it sharply:

Now that wily Kronos's son has given me
Glory at the ships; now that I have driven the Greeks to the sea,
Do not offer, fool, such counsels to the people.
No Trojan will listen to you; nor would I permit it. . . .
So Hector spoke, and the Trojans acclaimed him. . . .

The next day Hector is lost. Achilles has harried him across the field and is about to kill him. He has always been the stronger of the two in combat; how much the more so now, after several weeks of rest, ardent for vegeance and victory, against an exhausted enemy? And Hector stands alone, before the walls of Troy, absolutely alone, alone to wait for death and to steady his soul to face it:

Alas, were I to slip through the gate, behind the rampart,
Polydamas at once would heap dishonour on me. . . .
And now that through my recklessness I have destroyed my people,
I fear the Trojans and the long-robed Trojan women,
I fear to hear from someone far less brave than I:
'Hector, trusting his own strength too far, has ruined his people.' . . .
Suppose I were to down my bossed shield,
My massive helmet, and, leaning my spear against the wall,
Should go to meet renowned Achilles? . . .
But why spin out these fancies? Why such dreams?
I would not reach him, nor would he pity me,
Or respect me. He would kill me like a woman
If I came naked thus. . . .

Not a jot of the grief and ignominy that fall to the unfortunate is Hector spared. Alone, stripped of the prestige of force, he discovers that the courage that kept him from taking to the shelter of the walls is not enough to save him from flight:

Seeing him, Hector began to tremble. He had not the heart
To stay . . .
. . . It is not for a ewe nor the skin of an ox,
That they are striving, not these ordinary rewards of the race;
It is for a life that they run, the life of Hector, tamer of horses.

Wounded to death, he enhances his conqueror's triumph by vain supplications:

I implore you, by your soul, by your knees, by your parents. . . .

But the auditors of the *Iliad* knew that the death of Hector would be but a brief joy to Achilles, and the death of Achilles but a brief joy to the Trojans, and the destruction of Troy but a brief joy to the Achaians.

* * *

Thus violence obliterates anybody who feels its touch. It comes to seem just as external to its employer as to its victim. And from this springs the idea of a destiny before which executioner and victim stand equally innocent, before which conquered and conqueror are brothers in the same distress. The conquered brings misfortune to the conqueror, and vice versa:

> A single son, short-lived, was born to him.
> Neglected by me, he grows old—for far from home
> I camp before Troy, injuring you and your sons.

A moderate use of force, which alone would enable man to escape being enmeshed in its machinery, would require superhuman virtue, which is as rare as dignity in weakness. Moreover, moderation itself is not without its perils, since prestige, from which force derives at least three quarters of its strength, rests principally upon that marvellous indifference that the strong feel towards the weak, an indifference so contagious that it infects the very people who are the objects of it. Yet ordinarily excess is not arrived at through prudence or politic considerations. On the contrary, man dashes to it as to an irresistible temptation. The voice of reason is occasionally heard in the mouths of the characters in the *Iliad*. Thersites's speeches are reasonable to the highest degree; so are the speeches of the angry Achilles:

> Nothing is worth my life, not all the goods
> They say the well-built city of Ilium contains. . . .
> A man can capture steers and fatted sheep
> But, once gone, the soul cannot be captured back.

But words of reason drop into the void. If they come from an inferior, he is punished and shuts up; if from a chief, his actions betray them. And failing everything else, there is always a god handy to advise him to be unreasonable. In the end, the very idea of wanting to escape the role fate has allotted one—the business of killing and dying—disappears from the mind:

> We to whom Zeus
> Has assigned suffering, from youth to old age,
> Suffering in grievous wars, till we perish to the last man.

Already these warriors, like Craonne's so much later, felt themselves to be 'condemned men'.

* * *

It was the simplest trap that pitched them into this situation. At the outset, at the embarkation, their hearts are light, as hearts always are if you have a large force on your side and nothing but space to oppose you. Their weapons are in their hands; the enemy is absent. Unless your spirit has been conquered in advance by the reputation of the enemy, you always feel yourself to be much stronger than anybody who is not there. An absent man does not impose the yoke

of necessity. To the spirits of those embarking no necessity yet presents itself; consequently they go off as though to a game, as though on holiday from the confinement of daily life.

> Where have they gone, those braggadocio boasts
> We proudly flung upon the air at Lemnos,
> Stuffing ourselves with flesh of horned steers,
> Drinking from cups brimming over with wine?
> As for Trojans—a hundred or two each man of us
> Could handle in battle. And now one is too much for us.

But the first contact of war does not immediately destroy the illusion that war is a game. War's necessity is terrible, altogether different in kind from the necessity of peace. So terrible is it that the human spirit will not submit to it so long as it can possibly escape; and whenever it can escape it takes refuge in long days empty of necessity, days of play, of revery, days abitrary and unreal. Danger then becomes an abstraction; the lives you destroy are like toys broken by a child, and quite as incapable of feeling; heroism is but a theatrical gesture and smirched with boastfulness. This becomes doubly true if a momentary access of vitality comes to reinforce the divine hand that wards off defeat and death. Then war is easy and basely, coarsely loved.

But with the majority of the combatants this state of mind does not persist. Soon there comes a day when fear, or defeat, or the death of beloved comrades touches the warrior's spirit, and it crumples in the hand of necessity. At that moment war is no more a game or a dream; now at last the warrior cannot doubt the reality of its existence. And this reality, which he perceives, is hard, much too hard to be borne, for it enfolds death. Once you acknowledge death to be a practical possibility, the thought of it becomes unendurable, except in flashes. True enough, all men are fated to die; true enough also, a soldier may grow old in battles; yet for those whose spirits have bent under the yoke of war, the relation between death and the future is different than for other men. For other men death appears as a limit set in advance on the future; for the soldier death *is* the future, the future his profession assigns him. Yet the idea of man's having death for a future is abhorrent to nature. Once the experience of war makes visible the possibility of death that lies locked up in each moment, our thoughts cannot travel from one day to the next without meeting death's face. The mind is then strung up to a pitch it can stand for only a short time; but each new dawn reintroduces the same necessity; and days piled on days make years. On each one of these days the soul suffers violence. Regularly, every morning, the soul castrates itself of aspiration, for thought cannot journey through time without meeting death on the way. Thus war effaces all conceptions of purpose or goal, including even its own 'war aims'. It effaces the very notion of wars being brought to an end. To be outside a situation so violent as this is to find it inconceivable; to be inside it is to be unable to conceive its end. Consequently, nobody does anything to bring this end about. In the presence of an armed enemy,

what hand can relinquish its weapon? The mind ought to find a way out, but the mind has lost all capacity to so much as look outward. The mind is completely absorbed in doing itself violence. Always in human life, whether war or slavery is in question, intolerable sufferings continue because they have deprived the sufferer of the resources which look to the outsider as though they were easy to bear; actually, they continue because they have deprived the sufferer of the resources which might serve to extricate him.

Nevertheless, the soul that is enslaved to war cries out for deliverance, but deliverance itself appears to it in an extreme and tragic aspect, the aspect of destruction. Any other solution, more moderate, more reasonable in character, would expose the mind to suffering so naked, so violent that it could not be borne, even as memory. Terror, grief, exhaustion, slaughter, the annihilation of comrades—is it credible that these things should not continually tear at the soul, if the intoxication of force had not intervened to drown them? The idea that an unlimited effort should bring in only a limited profit or no profit at all is terribly painful.

> What? Will we let Priam and the Trojans boast
> Of Argive Helen, she for whom so many Greeks
> Died before Troy, far from their native land?
> What? Do you want us to leave the city, wide-streeted Troy,
> Standing, when we have suffered so much for it?

But actually what is Helen to Ulysses? What indeed is Troy, full of riches that will not compensate him for Ithaca's ruin? For the Greeks, Troy and Helen are in reality mere sources of blood and tears; to master them is to master frightful memories. If the existence of an enemy has made a soul destroy in itself the thing nature put there, then the only remedy the soul can imagine is the destruction of the enemy. At the same time the death of dearly loved comrades arouses a spirit of somber emulation, a rivalry in death:

> May I die, then, at once! Since fate has not let me
> Protect my dead friend, who far from home
> Perished, longing for me to defend him from death.
> So now I go to seek the murderer of my friend,
> Hector. And death shall I find at the moment
> Zeus wills it—
> Zeus and the other immortals.

It is the same despair that drives him on toward death, on the one hand, and slaughter on the other:

> I know it well, my fate is to perish here,
> Far from father and dearly loved mother; but meanwhile
> I shall not stop till the Trojans have had their fill of war.

The man possessed by this twofold need for death belongs, so long as he has not become something still different, to a different race from the race of the living.

What echo can the timid hopes of life strike in such a heart? How can it hear the defeated begging for another sight of the light of day? The threatened life has already been relieved of nearly all its consequence by a single, simple distinction: it is now unarmed; its adversary possesses a weapon. Furthermore, how can a man who has rooted

out of himself the notion that the light of day is sweet to the eyes respect such a notion when it makes its appearance in some futile and humble lament?

> I clasp tight your knees, Achilles. Have a thought, have pity for me.
> I stand here, O son of Zeus, a suppliant, to be respected.
> In your house it was I first tasted Demeter's bread,
> That day in my well-pruned vineyard you caught me
> And sold me, sending me far from father and friends,
> To holy Lemnos; a hundred oxen was my price
> And now I will pay you three hundred for ransom.
> This dawn is for me my twelfth day in Troy,
> After so many sorrows. See me here, in your hands,
> Through some evil fate. Zeus surely must hate me
> Who again puts me into your hands. Alas, my poor mother, Laothoe,
> Daughter of the old man, Altes—a short-lived son you have borne.

What a reception this feeble hope gets!

> Come, friend, you too must die. Why make a fuss about it?
> Patroclus, he too has died—a far better man than you are.
> Don't you see how handsome I am, how mighty?
> A noble father begat me, and I have a goddess for mother.
> Yet even I, like you, must some day encounter my fate,
> Whether the hour strikes at noon, or evening, or sunrise,
> The hour that comes when some arms-bearing warrior will kill me.

To respect life in somebody else when you have had to castrate yourself on all yearning for it demands a truly heart-breaking exertion of the powers of generosity. It is impossible to imagine any of Homer's warriors being capable of such an exertion, unless it is that warrior who dwells, in a peculiar way, at the very centre of the poem —I mean Patroclus, who 'knew how to be sweet to everybody', and who throughout the *Iliad* commits no cruel or brutal act. But then how many men do we know, in several thousand years of human history, who would have displayed such god-like generosity? Two or three?—even this is doubtful. Lacking this generosity, the conquering soldier is like a scourge of nature. Possessed by war, he, like the slave, becomes a thing, though his manner of doing so is different—over him too, words are as powerless as over matter itself. And both, at the touch of force, experience its inevitable effects: they become deaf and dumb.

* * *

Such is the nature of force. Its power of converting a man into a thing is a double one, and in its application double-edged. To the same degree, though in different fashions, those who use it and those who endure it are turned to stone. This property of force achieves its maximum effectiveness during the clash of arms, in battle, when the tide of the day has turned, and everything is rushing towards a decision. It is not the planning man, the man of strategy, the man acting on the resolution taken, who wins or loses a battle; battles are fought and decided by men deprived of these faculties, men who have undergone a transformation, who have dropped either to the level of inert matter, which is pure passivity, or to the level of blind force, which is pure momentum. Herein lies the last secret of war, a secret

revealed by the *Iliad* in its similes, which liken the warriors either to fire, flood, wind, wild beasts, or God knows what blind cause of disaster, or else to frightened animals, trees, water, sand, to anything in nature that is set into motion by the violence of external forces. Greeks and Trojans, from one day to the next, sometimes even from one hour to the next, experience, turn and turn about, one or the other of these transmutations:

> As when a lion, murderous, springs among the cattle
> Which by thousands are grazing over some vast marshy field . . . .
> And their flanks heave with terror; even so the Achaians
> Scattered in panic before Hector and Zeus, the great father.
>
> As when a ravening fire breaks out deep in a bushy wood
> And the wheeling wind scatters sparks far and wide,
> And trees, root and branch, topple over in flames;
> So Atreus's son, Agamemnon, roared through the ranks
> Of the Trojans in flight. . . .

The art of war is simply the art of producing such transformations, and its equipment, its processes, even the casualties it inflicts on the enemy, are only means directed toward this end—its true object is the warrior's soul. Yet these transformations are always a mystery; the gods are their authors, the gods who kindle men's imagination. But however caused, this petrifactive quality of force, twofold always, is essential to its nature; and a soul which has entered the province of force will not escape this except by a miracle. Such miracles are rare and of brief duration.

* * *

The wantonness of the conqueror that knows no respect for any creature or thing that is at its mercy or is imagined to be so, the despair of the soldier that drives him on to destruction, the obliteration of the slave or the conquered man, the wholesale slaughter—all these elements combine in the *Iliad* to make a picture of uniform horror, of which force is the sole hero. A monotonous desolation would result were it not for those few luminous moments, scattered here and there throughout the poem, those brief, celestial moments in which man possesses his soul. The soul that awakes then, to live for an instant only and be lost almost at once in force's vast kingdom, awakes pure and whole; it contains no ambiguities, nothing complicated or turbid; it has no room for anything but courage and love. Sometimes it is in the course of inner deliberation that a man finds his soul: he meets it, like Hector before Troy, as he tries to face destiny on his own terms, without the help of gods or men. At other times, it is in a moment of love that men discover their souls—and there is hardly any form of pure love known to humanity of which the *Iliad* does not treat. The tradition of hospitality persists, even through several generations, to dispel the blindness of combat.

> Thus I am for you a beloved guest in the breast of Argos . . .
> Let us turn our lances away from each other, even in battle.

The love of the son for the parents, of father for son, of mother for son, is continually described, in a manner as touching as it is curt:

> Thetis answered, shedding tears,
> 'You were born to me for a short life, my child, as you say . . .'

Even brotherly love:

> My three brothers whom the same mother bore for me,
> So dear. . . .

Conjugal love, condemned to sorrow, is of an astonishing purity. Imagining the humiliations of slavery which await a beloved wife, the husband passes over the one indignity which even in anticipation would stain their tenderness. What could be simpler than the words spoken by his wife to the man about to die?

> . . . Better for me
> Losing you, to go under the earth. No other comfort
> Will remain, when you have encountered your death-heavy fate,
> Only grief, only sorrow. . . .

Not less touching are the words addressed to a dead husband:

> Dear husband, you died young, and left me your widow
> Alone in the palace. Our child is still tiny,
> The child you and I, crossed by fate, had together.
> I think he will never grow up . . .
> For not in your bed did you die, holding my hand
> And speaking to me prudent words which forever
> Night and day, as I weep, might live in my memory.

The most beautiful friendship of all, the friendship between comrades-at-arms, is the final theme of the epic:

> . . . But Achilles
> Wept, dreaming of the beloved comrade; sleep, all-prevailing.
> Would not take him; he turned over again and again.

But the purest triumph of love, the crowning grace of war, is the friendship that floods the hearts of mortal enemies. Before it a murdered son or a murdered friend no longer cries out for vengeance. Before it—even more miraculous—the distance between benefactor and suppliant, between victor and vanquished, shrinks to nothing:

> But when thirst and hunger had been appeased,
> Then Dardanian Priam fell to admiring Achilles.
> How tall he was, and handsome; he had the face of a god;
> And in his turn Dardanian Priam was admired by Achilles,
> Who watched his handsome face and listened to his words.
> And when they were satisfied with contemplation of each other . . .

These moments of grace are rare in the *Iliad,* but they are enough to make us feel with sharp regret what it is that violence has killed and will kill again.

However, such a heaping-up of violent deeds would have a frigid effect, were it not for the note of incurable bitterness that continually makes itself heard, though often only a single word marks its presence, often a mere stroke of the verse, or a run-on line. It is in this that the *Iliad* is absolutely unique, in this bitterness that proceeds from tenderness and that spreads over the whole human race, impartial as sunlight. Never does the tone lose its colouring of bitterness; yet never does the bitterness drop into lamentation. Justice and love, which have hardly any place in this study of extremes and of unjust acts of

violence, nevertheless bathe the work in their light without ever becoming noticeable themselves, except as a kind of accent. Nothing precious is scorned, whether or not death is its destiny; everyone's unhappiness is laid bare without dissimulation or disdain; no man is set above or below the condition common to all men; whatever is destroyed is regretted. Victors and vanquished are brought equally near us; under the same head, both are seen as counterparts of the poet, and the listener as well. If there is any difference, it is that the enemy's misfortunes are possibly more sharply felt.

> So he fell there, put to sleep in the sleep of bronze,
> Unhappy man, far from his wife, defending his own people. . . .

And what accents echo the fate of the lad Achilles sold at Lemnos!

> Eleven days he rejoiced his heart among those he loved,
> Returning from Lemnos; the twelfth day, once more,
> God delivered him into the hands of Achilles,
> To him who had to send him, unwilling, to Hades.

And the fate of Euphorbus, who saw only a single day of war.

> Blood soaked his hair, that hair like to the Graces's . . .

When Hector is lamented:

> . . . guardian of chaste wives and little children. . . .

In these few words, chastity appears, dirtied by force, and childhood, delivered to the sword. The fountain at the gates of Troy becomes an object of poignant nostalgia when Hector runs by, seeking to elude his doom:

> Close by there stood the great stone tanks,
> Handsomely built, where silk-gleaming garments
> Were washed clean by Troy's lovely daughters and housewives
> In the old days of peace, long ago, when the Greeks had not come.
> Past these did they run their race, pursued and pursuer.

The whole of the *Iliad* lies under the shadow of the greatest calamity the human race can experience—the destruction of a city. This calamity could not tear more at the heart had the poet been born in Troy. But the tone is not different when the Achaeans are dying, far from home.

In so far as this other life, the life of the living, seems calm and full, the brief evocations of the world of peace are felt as pain:

> With the break of dawn and the rising of the day,
> On both sides arrows flew, men fell.
> But at the very hour that the woodcutter goes home to fix his meal
> In the mountain valleys when his arms have had enough
> Of hacking great trees, and disgust rises in his heart,
> And the desire for sweet food seizes his entrails,
> At that hour, by their valour, the Danaans broke the front

Whatever is not war, whatever war destroys or threatens, the *Iliad* wraps in poetry; the realities of war, never. No reticence veils the step from life to death:

> Then his teeth flew out; from two sides,
> Blood came to his eyes; the blood that from lips and nostrils
> He was spilling, open-mouthed; death enveloped him in its black cloud.

The cold brutality of the deeds of war is left undisguised; neither victors nor vanquished are admired, scorned, or hated. Almost always fate and the gods decide the changing lot of battle. Within the limits

fixed by fate, the gods determine with sovereign authority victory and defeat. It is always they who provoke those fits of madness, those treacheries, which are forever blocking peace; war is their true business; their only motives, caprice and malice. As for the warriors, victors or vanquished, those comparisons which liken them to beasts or things can inspire neither admiration nor contempt, but only regret that men are capable of being so transformed.

* * *

There may be, unknown to us, other expressions of the extraordinary sense of equity which breathes through the *Iliad*; certainly it has not been imitated. One is barely aware that the poet is a Greek and not a Trojan. The tone of the poem furnishes a direct clue to the origin of its oldest portions; history perhaps will never be able to tell us more. If one believes with Thucydides that eighty years after the fall of Troy, the Achaeans in their turn were conquered, one may ask whether these songs, with their rare references to iron, are not the songs of a conquered people, of whom a few went into exile. Obliged to live and die, 'very far from the homeland,' like the Greeks who fell before Troy, having lost their cities like the Trojans, they saw their own image both in the conquerors, who had been their fathers, and in the conquered, whose misery was like their own. They could still see the Trojan war over that brief span of years in its true light, unglossed by pride or shame. They could look at it as conquered and as conquerors simultaneously, and so perceive what neither conqueror nor conquered ever saw, for both were blinded. Of course, this is mere fancy; one can see such distant times only in fancy's light.

* * *

In any case, this poem is a miracle. Its bitterness is the only justifiable bitterness, for it springs from the subjection of the human spirit to force, that is, in the last analysis, to matter. This subjection is the common lot, although each spirit will bear it differently, in proportion to its own virtue. No one in the *Iliad* is spared by it, as no one on earth is. No one who succumbs to it is by virtue of this fact regarded with contempt. Whoever, within his own soul and in human relations, escapes the dominion of force is loved but loved sorrowfully because of the threat of destruction that constantly hangs over him.

Such is the spirit of the only true epic the Occident possesses. The *Odyssey* seems merely a good imitation, now of the *Iliad*, now of Oriental poems; the *Aeneid* is an imitation which, however brilliant, is disfigured by frigidity, bombast, and bad taste. The *chansons de geste*, lacking the sense of equity, could not attain greatness: in the *Chanson de Roland*, the death of an enemy does not come home to either author or reader in the same way as does the death of Roland.

Attic tragedy, or at any rate the tragedy of Aeschylus and Sophocles, is the true continuation of the epic. The conception of justice enlightens it, without ever directly intervening in it; here force

appears in its coldness and hardness, always attended by effects from whose fatality neither those who use it or those who suffer it can escape; here the shame of the coerced spirit is neither disguised, nor enveloped in facile pity, nor held up to scorn; here more than one spirit bruised and degraded by misfortune is offered for our admiration. The Gospels are the last marvellous expression of the Greek genius, as the *Iliad* is the first; here the Greek spirit reveals itself not only in the injunction given mankind to seek above all other goods, 'the kingdom and justice of our Heavenly Father', but also in the fact that human suffering is laid bare, and we see it in a being who is at once is divine and human. The accounts of the Passion show that a divine spirit, incarnate, is changed by misfortune, trembles before suffering and death, feels itself, in the depths of its agony, to be cut off from man and God. The sense of human misery gives the Gospels that accent of simplicity that is the mark of the Greek genius, and that endows Greek tragedy and the *Iliad* with all their value. Certain phrases have a ring strangely reminiscent of the epic, and it is the Trojan lad dispatched to Hades, though he does not wish to go, who comes to mind when Christ says to Peter: 'Another shall gird thee and carry thee whither thou wouldst not.' This accent cannot be separated from the idea that inspired the Gospels, for the sense of human misery is a pre-condition of justice and love. He who does not realize to what extent shifting fortune and necessity hold in subjection every human spirit, cannot regard as fellow-creatures nor love as he loves himself those whom chance separated from him by an abyss. The variety of constraints pressing upon man give rise to the illusion of several distinct species that cannot communicate. Only he who has measured the dominion of force, and knows how not to respect it, is capable of love and justice.

* * *

The relations between destiny and the human soul, the extent to which each soul creates its own destiny, the question of what elements in the soul are transformed by merciless necessity as it tailors the soul to fit the requirements of shifting fate, and of what elements can on the other hand be preserved, through the exercise of virtue and through grace—this whole question is fraught with temptations to falsehood, temptations that are positively enhanced by pride, by shame, by hatred, contempt, indifference, by the will to oblivion or to ignorance. Moreover, nothing is so rare as to see misfortune fairly portrayed; the tendency is either to treat the unfortunate person as though catastrophe were his natural vocation, or to ignore the effects of misfortune on the soul, to assume, that is, that the soul can suffer and remain unmarked by it, can fail, in fact, to be recast in misfortune's image. The Greeks, generally speaking, were endowed with spiritual force that allowed them to avoid self-deception. The rewards of this were great; they discovered how to achieve in all their acts the greatest lucidity, purity, and simplicity. But the spirit that was

transmitted from the *Iliad* to the Gospels by way of the tragic poets never jumped the borders of Greek civilization; once Greece was destroyed, nothing remained of this spirit but pale reflections.

Both the Romans and the Hebrews believed themselves to be exempt from the misery that is the common human lot. The Romans saw their country as the nation chosen by destiny to be mistress of the world; with the Hebrews, it was their God who exalted them and they retained their superior position just as long as they obeyed Him. Strangers, enemies, conquered peoples, subjects, slaves, were objects of contempt to the Romans; and the Romans had no epics, no tragedies. In Rome gladiatorial fights took the place of tragedy. With the Hebrews, misfortune was a sure indication of sin and hence a legitimate object of contempt; to them a vanquished enemy was abhorrent to God himself and condemned to expiate all sorts of crimes —this is a view that makes cruelty permissible and indeed indispensable. And no text of the Old Testament strikes a note comparable to the note heard in the Greek epic, unless it be certain parts of the book of Job. Throughout twenty centuries of Christianity, the Romans and the Hebrews have been admired, read, imitated, both in deed and word; their masterpieces have yielded an appropriate quotation every time anybody has had a crime he has wanted to justify.

Furthermore, the spirit of the Gospels was not handed down in a pure state from one Christian generation to the next. To undergo suffering and death joyfully was from the very beginning considered a sign of grace in the Christian martyrs—as though grace could do more for a human being than it could for Christ. Those who believe that God himself, once he became man, could not face the harshness of destiny without a long tremor of anguish, should have understood that the only people who can give the impression of having risen to a higher plane, who seem superior to ordinary human misery, are the people who resort to the aids of illusion, exaltation, fanaticism, to conceal the harshness of destiny from their own eyes. The man who does not wear the armour of the lie cannot experience force without being touched by it to the very soul. Grace can prevent this touch from corrupting him, but it cannot spare him the wound. Having forgotten it too well, Christian tradition can only rarely recover that simplicity that renders so poignant every sentence in the story of the Passion. On the other hand, the practice of forcible proselytization threw a veil over the effects of force on the souls of those who used it.

In spite of the brief intoxication induced at the time of the Renaissance by the discovery of Greek literature, there has been, during the course of twenty centuries, no revival of the Greek genius. Something of it was seen in Villon, in Shakespeare, Cervantes, Molière, and—just once—in Racine. The bones of human suffering are exposed in *L'Ecole des Femmes* and in *Phèdre,* love being the context—a strange century indeed, which took the opposite view from that of the epic period, and would only acknowledge human suffering in the context of love, while it insisted on swathing with

glory the effects of force in war and in politics. To the list of writers given above, a few other names might be added. But nothing the peoples of Europe have produced is worth the first known poem that appeared among them. Perhaps they will yet rediscover the epic genius, when they learn that there is no refuge from fate, learn not to admire force, not to hate the enemy, nor to scorn the unfortunate. How soon this will happen is another question.

Translated by MARY MCCARTHY.

IN THE ROOM

The lucid touch of the moon
Like reverie bathes your head.
From the cloisters of the shade
A fugitive pathos wakes,
And a quick insight strikes
Through mysteries long sealed,
As Plato's dagger held
Truth by the breastbone.

Say that we toiled in vain
In the mills of passion
To fill our hands with illusion
That the worm of time might feast:
But we must weave again
In living spirit and thought;
Must build in each other's breast
A roof against the night.

Enriched with that pure flow,
In the bridal of quiet lies
Flower, fount, genesis.
We nurse a twofold seed
That sinks a root to bless
The ruins of the vow:
The unweariable need
For a lost gentleness.

STANLEY SNAITH

OTHELLO

DEREK TRAVERSI

I

'SHAKESPEARE, one feels, arrives at an objective world by a process from himself as the centre and starting point'. T. S. Eliot's remark illuminates perhaps more than any other single phrase, the delicate blend of personal experience and objective presentation which characterizes Shakespeare's mature art. The artist seeks continually to clarify his emotions, to bring them out of obscurity into the light where they may be contemplated with full understanding in their significant relationships; and this he does by conforming with growing fidelity to the necessities of dramatic form. In other words the stage, far from hindering him in his expression, exercises in Shakespeare a salutory and essential discipline. The poet, whilst animating his conception by a personal emotion which enables him increasingly to identify himself with the various parts of his creation, allows each character and situation to exist, dramatically speaking, in its own right; the intensity of sympathy which produced them is balanced by the detachment of the contemplation which assigned to each its proper place in the complete artistic pattern. Read in this way Shakespeare's work shows a continual advance in control. As play follows play the ambiguous elements which dominate the early tragedies are segregated from one another, first separated into clear-cut dramatic conflicts and then gathered up into the more comprehensive 'symbolic' technique of the last plays. In this process, through which we can trace the emergence piece by piece of the complete Shakespearean pattern, *Othello* occupies a position of decisive importance.

Othello is, by common consent, one of Shakespeare's most completely 'objective' plays. The internal conflict of *Hamlet*, the identification of the hero's tragedy with the effort to achieve self-definition, is now polarized into the more truly dramatic conflict between Othello and Iago. The substitution as vehicles of the tragic emotion of one complex and incoherent character by two simpler, more sharply defined personalities in conflict carries with it an extension of the ability to present the dramative implications of character. This ability had been partially obscured in the 'problem' plays where the conception of motive is often uncertain and where sentiment is commonly more profound than coherent. Hamlet unites a vast number of impulses and feelings, often contradictory and conflicting, in the utterances of a single man, but it cannot be said that his behaviour is always consistent or his motives fully comprehensible. Othello, on the other hand, is fully and continually a person. His sentiments and actions are throughout perfectly intelligible, perfectly consistent with the character as defined; his emotions, unlike those of Hamlet, are always strictly related to their objective causes as dramatically pre-

sented. Othello, indeed, is the first of a series of Shakespearean heroes whose sufferings are explicitly related to their own failings, but who manage in spite of these failings to attain tragic dignity. Like Antony and Coriolanus after him, he dramatizes as 'nobility' his own innate incapacity to cope with life; and, as in their case, the very weakness which is obvious to all around him and by which Iago engineers his downfall, is turned into true tragedy. The dramatic construction of *Othello,* in short, turns upon the close, intricate analysis by which the two contrasted characters of the Moor and his Ancient are at every moment dovetailed, seen for what they are as opposed but strictly related conceptions. Scarcely since the First Part of *Henry IV* had Shakespeare presented character with such assurance; but the objectivity which had there merely illustrated a detached political study is now controlled by the presence of an intense tragic emotion.

To grasp the impulse from which this emotion was derived it is necessary to dwell a little upon certain distinctive poetic qualities of the play. Of all Shakespeare's works *Othello* perhaps dwells with the most exclusive concentration on the theme of physical passion. This concentration, which is even apt to produce in us a certain sense of spiritual claustrophobia, relates the play closely to certain persistent features of Shakespeare's work during the preceding years. The action of *Othello* is dominated at every point by elements already familiar in the Sonnets and 'problem' plays, elements present in the most characteristic utterances of the protagonists and serving to impart an underlying unity to the clear-cut conflict which provides the central dramatic action. The fact is that Othello and Iago are not only distinguished from one another and set in opposition by their contrasted attitude to love. They are also, beneath the obvious division, complementary figures contained in a coherent poetic mood, divergencies within what appears at a deeper level as a common way of feeling; and this mood, this feeling, is concerned with the force of physical passion and with the destructive tendencies that prevent its consummation in perfect union. Even the most positive expressions of emotion in the play suffer from an underlying sensation of failure to achieve fulfilment. The peculiar expression of Othello's passion is in this respect highly significant. His poetry naturally dwells repeatedly upon love, but the feeling expressed in that love is one which, by revealing its own incompleteness, suggests an inability to attain adequate expression. In his meditation, for example, over the sleeping Desdemona before he stifles her (V. ii.) we shall find intensity matched by a remarkable coldness, true sensuous feeling by a curious remoteness from the 'blood'. Beginning with an invocation to 'you *chaste* stars', he goes on to speak of a skin 'whiter than *snow*'[1] and '*smooth*

[1] Compare, as showing feeling of a similar kind, Othello's exclamation a few minutes later over Desdemona's dead body:

Cold, cold, my girl,
Even as thy chastity. (V. ii.)

as *monumental alabaster*'; and there is something intense but distant in the apostrophe which follows to 'thy light' and in the almost studied reference to 'Promethean heat'. Collecting together these images, we come to feel that Othello's passion at this critical moment is as cold on the surface as it is intense just below; it combines a certain monumental frigidity in the expression with a tremendous impression of the activity of the senses.

That the senses are present is clearly guaranteed—at this stage in the play—by Othello's own behaviour; and, indeed, the same speech proves that this is so. As he gazes upon his victim, his underlying sensuality is felt above all in the comparison of Desdemona to the 'rose' and in the keenness with which the sense of smell appears in 'balmy breath' and in the phrase 'I'll smell it on the tree'[2]. Even here, however, the sense of incompleteness persists. The impression is one of an overwhelming passion unable to express itself otherwise than in cold and distant imagery: the imagery, never quite freed from the conventional, of the Sonnets. One could not imagine Antony making love to Cleopatra in these terms. Antony's love has at its command a vast, rich, unambiguous range of imagery; Othello's is an intense desire which cannot really surpass the conventional in its expression. Even when he is stressing the full happiness he had hoped to find in perfect love, he chooses to see perfection not in terms of overflowing vitality but in the chill flawlessness of a precious stone:

> Nay, had she been true,
> If heaven would make me such another world
> Of one entire and perfect *chrysolite*,
> I'ld not have sold her for it. (V. ii.)

It is not, indeed, in devotion to Desdemona that Othello expresses most powerfully the full possibilities of his nature. The strength of his passionately emotional being finds adequate expression, not in love, but in triumphant soldiership, in his reference to the—

> Pride, pomp, and circumstance of glorious war.

Here in the poetry of action, untrammelled by reference to objects and needs beyond itself, the egoism essential to the character realizes itself fully and without hindrance. In Othello's love poetry the same intensity fails to express itself completely towards another person; it remains apparently cold on the surface with an intense fire beneath that makes it the more capable of corruption.

This corruption, the central theme of the play, is the work of Iago. The image of the 'rose' already referred to implies, in Shakespeare,

[2] It is useful to recall at this point the frequency with which the rose is associated, in the Sonnets, with the 'canker' of faithlessness:

> How sweet and lovely dost thou make the shame
> Which, like a canker in the fragrant rose,
> Doth spot the beauty in thy budding name! (Sonnet XCV).

'Fragrant' here, incidentally, can usefully be associated in its effect with '*balmy* breath' in the speech under consideration. There are other parallels in the play: Othello, in accusing Desdemona, addresses her as a 'rose-lippec cherubin' and subsequently as a 'weed' so lovely 'that the sense aches at thee' (IV. ii).

that of the 'canker' which destroys it; the simultaneous presence of these twin aspects of passion is here given tragic projection in a clash of opposed attitudes. To understand fully the inadequacy of Othello's passion we have to turn to Iago; for the two characters, as I have said, are contrasted aspects of a single intuition. At first sight the Ancient is all that his general is not, cynical and 'intellectual' where Othello is passionate and trusting to the point of folly. These qualities, however, are not merely opposed but complementary. If Othello's passion expresses itself in a peculiar coldness, Iago's cynicism and belittlement of natural emotion are full of the feeling of 'blood'. 'Blood', or sexual emotion, is the driving force of his intelligence, although it is a force always controlled and criticised by that intelligence. He tells Desdemona on her arrival at Cyprus that he is 'nothing if not critical' (II. i.) and he shows Roderigo a passionate (that is the only word for it) contempt for 'blood'; but it is 'blood' which is at the root of the man, criticism and all. Consider the temper of his remarks to Roderigo, when he is advancing the claims of reason and control:

> If the balance of our lives had not one scale of reason to poise another of sensuality, the blood and baseness of our natures would conduct us to most preposterous conclusions; but we have reason to cool our raging motions, our carnal stings, our unbitted lusts. (I. iii.)

How intensely we feel 'blood' at work in the very criticism of passion! 'Reason' balances—'poises', as Shakespeare so delicately puts it—the scale of sensuality, foreseeing in its unchecked operation the 'most preposterous conclusions'; but the vigour of the references to 'raging motions', 'carnal stings', and 'unbitted lusts' demonstrates unmistakeably the source of Iago's peculiar vitality in action. His is, in fact, the reason of *Hamlet,* perverted from its 'god-like' function of harmonizing the various human faculties in the pursuit of a clearly understood end to a principle of negation and destruction. Although Iago sees more clearly than Hamlet, his destructive attitude proceeds from the same inversion of normal human functions, and his superior clarity only produces a greater consistency in negation. Where Hamlet's motives for rejecting life are confused, contradictory, those of Iago are consistently cynical and degrading; but the same negative attitude to the flesh is behind the judgements of both. Iago's intellect dwells from the first pungently, insistently upon the bestiality which underlies human passion; but the presence of the despised emotions is implied by the very intensity with which they are contemplated. It is impossible not to feel the intense sexuality behind his feverish activity in the dark at the opening of the play. Revealing itself in the persistent animality with which he incites Roderigo to disturb 'the fertile climate' in which Desdemona's father dwells and so to 'poison his delight', it dominates both the man and the scene:

> Even now, now, very now, an old black ram
> Is tupping your white ewe. Arise, arise;
> Awake the snorting citizens with the bell,
> Or else the devil will make a grandsire of you.

The grotesque tone of the last few lines in itself reflects the source of the intensity behind Iago's every action. Describing the relationship between Othello and Desdemona, he speaks of his general as a 'Barbary horse' and refers to 'coursers' and 'gennets' as the product of their union; he warns Brabantio that 'your daughter and the Moor are now making the beast with two backs'. Lastly, in anticipating Desdemona's faithlessness, his irony expresses itself through a tremendous sensitivity to the contact of the flesh:

> Lechery, by this hand; an index and obscure prologue to the history of lust and foul thoughts. They met so near with their lips that their breaths embraced together. (II. i.)

The 'foul thoughts' are, of course, Iago's own, characteristically transferred by the operation of his own perverted sensuality to the objects of his contemplation. In such passages, the disgust which underlies *Troilus and Cressida* and *Hamlet* without there achieving complete definition (except, perhaps, in the character of Thersites) is gathered up in a tone of Machiavellian cynicism. The 'philosophy' which underlies this disgust will have to be considered more closely. For the moment it is enough to note that the passionate Othello never expresses himself in love with such physical intensity as the sceptical, controlled Iago; in this paradox lies the key to the whole play.

It is Shakespeare's achievement to have converted into a tragedy this intuition of opposed emotion simultaneously present in a single situation. To state such an intuition in a single lyrical moment (as he had done in some of the Sonnets) is one thing; to bring it into being stage by stage in an action, a closely-knit development of character and incident within the limits of a play, is quite another. Othello and Iago, for the three hour duration of their tragedy, live the conflict active in Shakespeare's imagination. If Iago, to use once more the phrasing of the Sonnets, represents the 'canker' in the 'rose' of Othello's love we must watch that canker gaining ground step by step in the development of the intrigue. The egoistic nature of Othello's love must not only be defined; we must watch it crumble, through its own blindness, into helplessness and incoherence. The process must be strictly dramatic. The defects by which Iago engineers the down-fall of his victim must be those first stated, or at least implied, in his own utterances. Othello, the tragic hero in his weakness and nobility, stands at the centre of the play. In his self-imposed consistency he is the point upon which the whole action turns; the forces which dissolve his integrity operate through the hostility of Iago by bringing to the surface his own deficiencies. The fusion of dramatic purpose and poetic impulse sought by Shakespeare in the self-defining complexities of the 'problem' plays is at last achieved in the full objectivity of his first completely realized and in some ways most disquieting tragedy.

Shakespeare loses no time in indicating beneath the appearance of consistency and strength the fundamental weakness of his hero. One can detect from the first in Othello's every assertion a note of self-

dramatization, as though each action beyond its intrinsic importance must also be regarded as a contribution to the rhetorical fiction whose justification is a main purpose of his life. His real nobility is in acute danger of turning into a pose because he feels at every moment the need to conform to a self-portrait of his own creation. His first utterance (I. ii.) is a round assertion—full, splendid, rhetorical—of his royal lineage and of his services to Venice:

> My service, which I have done the signiory,
> Shall out-tongue his complaint.
> . . . I fetch my life and being
> From men of royal seige.

One need not deny the power of his impulsive rhetoric or minimize the true stature of the speaker; but one can also sense in the same incident a touch of irony in the too facile gesture to his audience which follows: 'When I know that boasting is an honour'. Othello's rapt declamations are not boasting, because boasting implies a self-consciousness, a conceit which is far from the essential simplicity of the character; but they show a certain barbaric complacency which has already allowed Iago to alude to his speeches as 'bombast circumstance' (I. i.) and will shortly induce him to caricature his description of his love-making as so much 'bragging' and 'fantastical lies'. The complement of this complacency, the defect of 'a free and open nature', is the simplicity which leads Othello throughout to think 'men honest that but seem to be so' (I. iii.), to misread the characters and motives of those around him in the light of his own naïve self-esteem.

This complacency directly affects his love. Othello, in spite of himself, submits with a touch of unwillingness to love. He feels it somehow incongruous with the 'unhoused free condition' in which alone his rhetorical instincts can attain full expression; and even the first appearance of Desdemona, whose love can so easily become for him a condition of 'circumscription and confine', merely underlines the possibility of tragedy. For Othello is rarely able to get sufficiently far from himself fully to love Desdemona. His happiness in these opening scenes is like everything in his character self-centred, naïve, egoistic; and his account of his wooing (I. iii.) makes this clear. It was, in fact, by his passionate, simple-minded delight in his own magnificent career that he won her; and—we may fairly add—it was mainly because his love-making ministered to his self-esteem that he valued her:

> She lov'd me for the dangers I had pass'd
> And I lov'd her that *she did pity them.*

Othello's estimate of his situation is nothing if not simple; but his simplicity is terribly, tragically vulnerable.

For the subtleties in the knot of passion, though neglected by him, are by no means excluded. Othello brushes them impatiently aside, but the early scenes of the play show them creeping from time to time into his utterance, giving already a first hint of instability to his egoism. There is something ominous in the terms in which he begs the

Duke and his councellors to allow Desdemona to accompany him to Cyprus:

> Vouch with me, heaven, I therefore beg it not
> To please the palate of my appetite;
> Nor to comply with heat—the young effects
> In me defunct—and proper satisfaction;
> But to be free and bounteous to her mind;
> And heaven defend your great souls, that you think
> I will your serious and great business scant
> For she is with me. (I. iii.)

The sentiment is unexceptionable, but the resolution is a little too easily made. Not for the first time, Othello dismisses confidently the very failings with which in the event he is to stand condemned. Unconsidered motives affect his words in the stressing, by phrases which directly recall the 'problem plays, of the very elements he is dismissing. The references to 'heat' and to 'the palate of my appetite', which contrast so oddly with the vague, confident opulence of his plea, take us back—on the one hand—to *Troilus and Cressida* and forward —on the other—to Othello's own behaviour as the tragedy unfolds itself. In view of the fact that the despised elements of sensuality are soon to force their way into the play until Othello's own utterances are saturated with them we are justified in allowing them even here a certain importance. Equally in the second part of the same speech we may read an unconscious irony into the contemptuous dismissal of the possibility that the mere 'disports' of love may undermine his devotion to the serious business of war:

> when light-wing'd toys
> Of feathered Cupid seel with wanton dullness
> My speculative and officed instruments,
> That my disports corrupt and taint my business,
> Let housewives make a skillet of my helm,
> And all malign and base adversities
> Make head against my estimation. (I. iii.)

Once more the very facility of the contrast indicates danger for the speaker. In the mouth of Othello the characteristic Shakespearean contrast between reason and passion, between the nobility of the 'speculative and officed instruments' and the 'wanton dullness' of the inferior passions is too easily made. Othello, who here ostensibly dismisses love in the name of the controlling reason, spurns it in fact because he feels it to be a 'circumscription' of his simple, barbaric self-hood, of a conception of his own dignity which is essentially instinctive, unreasonable; for that very reason he is peculiarly exposed to the irrational forces of animal feeling. Indeed, the whole of his subsequent history is a tragic comment upon his facile opposition between the 'serious and great business' of generalship, in which he finds a satisfaction not less passionate for being ostensibly divorced from love, and the fatal promptings of an 'appetite' whose real power and importance he never admits or understands and which therefore ruins him.

The existence of this contrast is confirmed by the atmosphere of doubt and foreboding which surrounds his love. This atmosphere,

charged with the implications of 'appetite' so easily brushed aside by Othello, are particularly associated with the otherwise secondary figure of Desdemona. For the Venetians around Desdemona, her relations with the 'lascivious' Moor are mysterious, unnatural, and deeply disturbing. Her own father, believing to the last that his own child has deceived him, is full of a sense of betrayal. He feels, moreover, that this betrayal has been the result of diabolic practices. Desdemona's action proceeds, for him, from a perversion of the judgement, and passion is a poison, in inexplicable contrast with his daughter's docility, which acts through the erring senses and enslaves the will. Desdemona, he concludes, has been enticed from her natural duty by a 'treason of the blood' (I. i.) which cannot be accounted for in terms of normal behaviour:

> A maiden never bold;
> Of spirit so still and quiet that her motion
> Blush'd at herself; and she—in spite of nature,
> Of years, of country, credit, everything—
> To fall in love with what she fear'd to look on!
> It is a judgement maim'd and most imperfect,
> That will confess perfection so could err
> Against all rules of nature; and must be driven
> To find out practices of cunning hell,
> Why this should be. I therefore vouch again,
> That with some mixtures powerful o'er the blood,
> Or with some dram conjured to this effect,
> He wrought upon her. (I. iii.)

The presence of dangerous, unconsidered complexities in Othello's passion is here balanced by a sense of something similar ascribed to Desdemona. In his perplexity, Brabantio lays exaggerated emphasis upon his daughter's submissiveness until simplicity itself becomes, in this world of sophistication and scepticism, faintly equivocal. The adjectives 'still and quiet' and the suggestion, barely indicated, of shame in 'blush'd at herself' stand in a peculiar relationship to the mixtures 'powerful o'er the blood' which have overcome her judgement. One need not, of course, in making this point, accept Iago's account of Desdemona as a 'supersubtle Venetian' who has moulded the ingenuous 'erring barbarian' to her purposes; though it is true that Brabantio's own parting words do something to endorse this view:

> Look to her, Moor, if thou hast eyes to see:
> She has deceived her father and may thee. (I. iii.)

Iago invariably pushes his own interpretations of human motive to the extreme indicated by his own peculiar logic, and in so doing falsifies true experience. In particular, he represents only one possible attitude —the least flattering—to love, but this attitude is palpably present in what we might call the Venetian atmosphere of the play and springs from reservations actually present in Shakespeare's experience and not new to *Othello*. For behind Desdemona is a contrast already implied in *Hamlet* and *Measure for Measure* and especially in the women of these plays: the contrast between simple virtue and the incalculable consequences of physical desire. Ophelia, Isabella, and Desdemona belong, in some respects, to a single type. Moving in a

world full of violent and unbridled desires their virtue, in its own despite, is not unaffected by them. Ophelia, whose mad grief finally expresses itself in bawdy songs, is contaminated by the subconscious presence of emotions long repressed by parental domination which only come to the surface under the pressure of grief; Isabella's purity, steeled against human sympathy, becomes a 'bait' for Angelo's unconsidered sensual instincts and, in the process of defending itself against this unexpected threat, acquires a slightly strained and inhuman note. Desdemona's case is a little different. Her behaviour, inclined as she is to play with ingenuous simplicity upon the potent forces she has unleashed in Othello, is never more than foolish, but Iago's criticisms—and Brabantio's bewilderment—relate her to the women of the earlier plays. For all three, virtuous as they are, are conceived in the light of an experience in which contradiction still prevails over clarity. They have the power—almost in spite of themselves—to exercise upon men an influence of whose strength they remain until the last moment almost entirely unaware; and this power, given a logical basis and interpretation in Iago's 'philosophy' of 'nature', becomes a fatal principle of dissolution and destruction.

If Othello's 'nobility' provides one of the main conceptions upon which the whole closely-knit structure of the play rests, the 'critical' scepticism of Iago is certainly the other. Through his plotting the mysterious poison which had worked, according to Brabantio, upon Othello through Desdemona's 'still and quiet' spirit becomes an active and sinister reality. For Iago *is* that poison, no longer hinted at in ambiguous phrases or obscurely present in minds never fully conscious of it, but turning Brabantio's doubts to destructive activity. His actions, indeed, reflect a 'philosophy', a view of 'nature' in accordance with which Othello's downfall is an inevitable as his love. This conception of 'nature', which plays a prominent part also in *King Lear,* seems to cover the normal conditions of life as they appear to what purports to be the unprejudiced intelligence. It is regarded by those who accept it in the tragedies as favourable to an anarchic conception of life, indulgent to unchecked passion and hostile to any attribution of spiritual value or sense of moral obligation. The chief devotees of 'nature' are Iago, for whom destructive action is a 'pleasure' which makes the hours seem short (II. iii.), and Edmund in *King Lear,* who brings his own father to blindness and follows the impulses of his appetite to destruction. Yet the state of 'nature', though it favours the operations of unchecked individual appetite, is by no means synonymous with irrationality. Possibly a malady of the intellect, it is certainly not a renunciation of the judgement. Both in Edmund and Iago devotion to 'nature' is compatible with keen insight and a critical outlook; but this insight and outlook operate unchecked by considerations that transcend the purely personal. When Iago describes himself to Roderigo as one of those who

> . . . trimmed in forms and visages of duty,
> Keep yet their hearts attending on themselves. (I. i.)

it is worth noting, as evidence of the continuity underlying Shakespeare's thought at this time, that his words are no more than a 'Machiavellian' interpretation of Horatio's reflections on the 'man who is not passion's slave' in *Hamlet* (III. i.). The difference lies in the amoral conception of 'nature' as the background conditioning all human life. 'Nature', as conceived in *Othello* and *Lear*, is completely divorced from 'value' or 'degree', sanctions full independence of action in the pursuit of selfish ends. Edmund, accepting her as his 'goddess' (*Lear* I. ii.), allows no filial or human consideration to dissuade him from his purpose; and Iago, for whom the following of self-interest is a proof of true manliness ('These fellows have some soul'), holds that constancy in love is unnatural, inconsistent with the conditions of physical desire, and so inconceivable. In this interpretation of the law of 'nature' Iago is, in reality, merely carrying to a logical conclusion the Shakespearean conviction, already developed in many of the Sonnets and in *Troilus*, of the impermanence which seems to be a necessary feature of all emotions founded upon 'blood' and subject to temporal decay. Since time dominates human experience, and since spiritual 'value'—after Troilus's failure to maintain the contrary—dwells only in 'particular will', love is merely an 'appetite', a 'lust of the blood and a permission of the will' (I. iii.). One object, therefore, may satisfy desire as readily as another. The 'permission of the will', indeed, is always required; but since its aim, according to Iago, can be nothing but physical satisfaction, the attainment of that satisfaction becomes the only imperative which the will can recognize. In this way, the cynical, evil-willing 'Machiavellianism' of Elizabethan commonplace becomes a vehicle for all the destructive tendences in Shakespeare's reading of human limitations.

Such a 'philosophy' leads Iago, logically enough, to a pessimistic interpretation of love; for satisfaction, in experiences purely physical, leads fatally to satiation and the craving for change. There is nothing in the world of 'nature' to prevent desire from passing easily—and meaninglessly—from one object to another. In the case of Desdemona, Iago's contention is that it must so pass—

> Mark me with what violence she first loved the Moor, but for bragging and telling her fantastical lies; and will she love him still for prating? Let not thy discreet heart think it. Her eye must be fed; and what delight shall she have to look on the devil? When the blood is made dull with the act of sport, there should be again to enflame it and to give satiety a fresh appetite, loveliness in favour, sympathy in years, manners and beauties; all which the Moor is defective in; now, for want of these required conveniences, her delicate tenderness will find itself abused, begin to heave the gorge, disrelish and abhor the Moor; very nature will instruct her in it and compel her to some second choice. (II. i.)

Iago is convinced, in accordance with his own reading of 'nature', that the 'violence' of physical desire is necessarily transient, and that this transience, once the original impulse has been satiated, will *compel* Desdemona to a second choice. Love, being merely a prompting of the senses to which the will gives assent, needs to be continually

'inflamed' if the blood itself is not to be 'made dull with the act of sport'. For love, as in *Troilus,* is simply an 'appetite', intense but impermanent like all sensual experiences, and in particular like the impressions of taste. Now 'as luscious as locusts', it will become shortly 'as bitter as coloquintida' (I. iii.); the fact that the keenly palated imagery of the earlier play survives in Iago's statement points once more to the continuity of Shakespeare's interests. In the moment of fulfilment love, Iago tells us, is full of relish, of 'delicate tenderness'; but it must continually be 'fed', lest it turn to abhorrence, 'disrelish' and 'heave the gorge' in nausea at the former object of its choice. The original impulse whose satisfaction has led to repletion, equally fatally demands renewal; without this, it turns to indifference and even to loathing. In this way the doubts and reservations that from the first accompany Othello's love in the minds of those who surround him are given clear logical expression. Brabantio had thought that Desdemona's choice of Othello, because prompted by irrational passion, was against the rules of nature; Iago, on the contrary, not only believes that the choice was natural but that 'nature', which had brought her to it, would inevitably drive her to change. It is the conflict between this attitude, at once rational and essentially destructive, and Othello's generous but uncritical acceptance of the promptings of passion that is the subject of the play.

II

By the beginning of the Second Act of *Othello* the positions of the chief characters in the play have been adequately defined. The attitude which prompts Iago in his activities is particularly clear. His is the part played by the 'canker' that destroys the rose in the Sonnets; to him is due the 'festering' of the lily that turns beauty to corruption. But this conviction, having attained intellectual definition and the will to convert it into action, calls for dramatic representation in the interplay of motive and character. The process of disintegration to which Othello is subjected begins almost as soon as he arrives at Cyprus on his mission of war. Before the canker begins to work, however, Shakespeare balances one against the other the contrasted forces of the play. The Second Act, which opens with Othello's fortunate landing and should have been marked by the peaceful consummation of his marriage, ends in a night of drunkenness and strife in which Iago's plot is fast taking shape. But before the destructive process begins, we are given one brief glimpse of Othello in his happiness. Separated by stormy seas during their voyage from Venice, he meets Desdemona once more at Cyprus and enjoys a brief moment of fulfilment which, it seems, nothing in life can equal. His one desire is to hold this moment, to make it eternal:

> If it were now to die,
> 'T were now to be most happy; for I fear,
> My soul hath her content so absolute
> That not another comfort like to this
> Succeeds in unknown fate. (II. i.)

But even here Othello *fears*. This precarious moment of happiness is something absolute, something which will never find its fellow; for the temporal process, as we have seen, is one of dissolution and decay. Only death can come between this temporary communion and its eclipse; but death, of course, implies the annihilation of the personality and with it the end of love. Like a harmony which has touched the culminating point of its development, love must either cease or turn fatally to the discord which Iago foresees in his prophetic aside:

> O, you are well tuned now:
> But I'll set down the pegs that make this music.

In the extended use, against a background of tempest at sea, of the musical metaphor of harmony as a symbol of spiritual concord, Shakespeare anticipates for the first time the symbolic technique of *Pericles* and *The Winter's Tale;* but the device remains inevitably unsustained in a play in which the elements of destruction and discord clearly prevail. The scene, indeed, represents no more than a moment of harmony which cannot, in the nature of things, be durable. As soon as the lovers have left the scene, Iago's destructive cynicism returns—in the critical tone of his dialogue with Roderigo—to become the driving-point of the action. From this moment it never loses command.

The transition from concord and fulfilment to passion-driven strife is handled by Shakespeare with considerable care. In the following scene (II. iii.) the motives of felicity and disillusionment are simultaneously developed. It is night, the night in which Othello has announced 'the celebration of his nuptials': but also the night in which Iago's activity turns rejoicing into savagery and drunkenness. His instrument to this end is Cassio, in whom all his unflattering conclusions with regard to human emotions find their confirmation. We shall only understand Iago's part in this tragedy if we realize that he plays throughout upon the real weaknesses of his victims. These weaknesses he elevates, following his 'philosophy', into consistent principles, turning what is largely infirmity, susceptibility, or indecision into a positive tendency to evil; but his observations, though they do not account fully for the behaviour of his victims, always pick upon something really vulnerable in them. And that something is invariably connected with desire or 'appetite'. Cassio he describes in this spirit as one who puts on 'the mere form of civil and humane seeming for the better compassing of his salt and most hidden loose affection' (II. i.). The description is highly typical. Iago cannot conceive of human weakness as less than fully conscious. Believing in the controlling power of 'corrigible authority' (I. iii.), and in the will's tendency to follow the impulses which nothing in his conception of 'nature' can prompt it to check, he is led to rationalize Cassio's failing, turning susceptibility into positive cunning; but the short encounter with Bianca (III. iv.) is there to show that his judgement is not unrelated to fact. Cassio's attitude to Desdemona is thoroughly characteristic of the man. His imagination, stirred by Iago, lingers upon her

with intense but passing sensuality. She is 'exquisite', 'a fresh and delicate creature', with an 'inviting' though 'right modest eye'. He regards her, in short, as a choice morsel to be contemplated, tasted and enjoyed, so that Iago, in speaking of 'provocation' and an 'alarum to love' (II. iii.), simply gives substance to an innermost thought. For Iago merely brings consistency to unrealized desires, which thereby become in his hands instruments all the more dangerous for being imperfectly understood by his victims. Having observed in Cassio just sufficient 'loose affection' to make his accusations plausible, he uses him to bring out Othello's unconsidered sensuality, to ruin his judgement and destroy his peace.

By inflaming the fuddled Cassio to riot Iago releases the forces of passion on the island. The words in which he describes the origin of the brawl to the roused and angry Othello are notable:

> friends all but now, even now,
> In quarter, and in terms like bride and groom
> Devesting them for bed; and then, but now,
> As if some planet had unwitted men,
> Swords out, and tilting one at other's breast,
> In opposition bloody.

The peace of the island is explicitly related, by the mention of the bridal bed, to the concurrent consummation of Othello's marriage; and his happiness, like the harmony of Cyprus, is broken up by something irrational which 'unwits' him, escapes his understanding.[3] To the sound of the 'dreadful bell' whose sinister clamour, awakening the inhabitants of the isle, frightens them 'from their propriety', the prospects of concord between man and man, and between the spiritual and sensual elements in the individual soul, are rapidly, irrecoverably broken. As the drunken revelry, prevailing, takes the mind prisoner, the unchecked forces of 'blood' enter the play in the night of unreason and obscurity. Jealousy, preceded by unreflecting rage, creeps into Othello's mind, as strife enters Cyprus, through Iago's action upon the instability which makes his will—unknown to himself—the slave of passion. Already the coming dissolution of his integrity achieves a certain expression. Once his happiness has been disturbed, the tone of his anger contrasts significantly with his earlier assertion of self-control:

> Now, by heaven,
> My blood begins my safer guides to rule,
> And passion, having my best judgment collied,
> Assays to lead the way.

Othello himself now sets 'blood'-inspired anger against the safer guides of reason, admits that this anger is a force that threatens to contaminate his 'judgement', his '*safer* guides', and carry him into ill-con-

[3] Note the reference to the 'planet' and compare Othello's bewildered comment at the end of the play:

> It is the very error of the moon;
> She comes more nearer earth than she was wont
> And makes men mad. (V. ii.)

sidered acts. Iago has already begun to work upon his weakness. He has known from the first that this is a victim who will tenderly be led by the nose, 'as asses are' (I. iii.); his certainty is founded upon his reading of Othello's simplicity. Othello, as we have seen, has neglected the part played by physical desire in his 'free and bounteous' love for Desdemona; Iago, for whom all love is simply the reaching out of such desire for gratification, gives a very different interpretation of the Moor's character:

> His soul is so enfetter'd to her love,
> That she may make, unmake, do what she list,
> Even as her appetite shall play the god
> With his weak function. (II. iii.)

It was precisely this idea of being 'enfettered' by his love, by the prompting of his 'blood', that Othello had so decisively rejected in asking permission to bring Desdemona to Cyprus; it offended his belief in himself as a warrior and as a man. But Iago's action, based as always on the rationalization of affection as 'appetite', aims directly at the dissolution of this heroic simplicity and at subduing Othello by bringing out the animal beneath.

In this he succeeds with surprising ease: surprising, that is, unless we remember how Shakespeare has prepared the way by stressing the Moor's disastrous ingenuousness. Iago knows that his victim, once confused, is lost; and so his first step is to involve him in uncertainty. For Othello is quite incapable of suspending judgement. Suspense offends his self-confidence, contrasts with the capacity for action upon which above all he prides himself. His nature demands an immediate resolution, which can be in practice nothing but an acceptance of Iago's insinuations:

> to be once in doubt
> Is once to be resolved; exchange me for a goat,
> When I shall turn the business of my soul
> To such exsufflicate and blown surmises
> Matching thy inference. (III. iii.)

Few things in the presentation of Othello are more damning than this continual tendency to protest rhetorically against the presence of the very weaknesses that are undoing him. He refers contemptuously to the 'goat', the most notorious symbol of sensuality, just as Iago is poisoning his mind through his blood-inspired imagination; and the reference, strengthened by the sense in 'exsufflicate' of the beast breathing heavily in the external manifestations of passion, is at once grotesque and significant.

Flattering his victim's 'free and open nature', Iago proceeds to clip the wings of his freedom and to convert his frankness into suspicion. He recalls the persistent misgivings that had originally surrounded the marriage—'She did deceive her father, marrying you'; he stressed the inequality of 'clime, complexion, and degree' (note 'degree': Othello, we remember, claimed descent from men 'of royal seige') in a way at once calculated to hurt his pride and to emphasize his ignorance, as a foreigner and a man of alien race, of Desdemona's

true motives; above all he insinuates that her apparent purity of purpose may conceal a sensual corruption of the will:

> Foh, one may smell in such a will most rank,
> Foul disproportion, thoughts unnatural. (III. iii.)

The last assertion is really the important one. The others do little more than prepare the ground for it. Iago's purpose is, in his own words, 'to act upon the blood', to make the sensual basis of Othello's passion—hitherto concealed from Othello himself—come to the surface in the form of destructive jealousy. The victim's mind must be infected. Iago's conception of love as so much corrupt 'appetite' must take possession of it, demoralize it, destroy it. He must be made to see Desdemona, in short, as Iago's 'philosophy' insists that she really is. She is natural, 'the wine she drinks is made of grapes' (II. ii.); therefore, her 'blest condition' must be fatally, inevitably subiect to inconstancy.

It is worth noting that Iago has already begun by throwing doubt upon the purity of his own thoughts. Othello believes that 'men should be what they seem'; his whole life is founded upon the assumption that our motives are few and our spiritual needs simple, our actions completely within our control. Iago's reply infers that the assumption is gratuitous, that not only the motives of others but even our own, are open to obscure and scarcely apprehended reservations:

> Utter my thoughts? Why, say they are false and vile;
> As where's that palace whereinto foul thoughts
> Sometimes intrude not. (III. iii.)

It is because his 'philosophy' enables him to establish contast with the lower, unconsidered elements of Othello's emotional being that Iago is able to destroy the simplicity of his victim and to reduce him to a mass of contradictions and uncontrolled impulses. Having once deprived him of certainty he plays upon his sensual fancy, describes Cassio's 'dream' with a full insistence upon the grossness of physical contacts, makes him visualize the sin by which Desdemona is offending his self-esteem. Othello responds to these insinuations with an intensity that proceeds from hitherto unsuspected aspects of his nature. He demands instant proof. The completeness of his fall is reflected in the grotesque irony implicit in his demand: 'Villain, be sure thou prove my love a whore'; and Iago leads him on with a sneer that now works like poison on his fantasy:

> . . . how satisfied, my lord?
> Would you, the supervisor, grossly gape on?
> Behold her topp'd? (III. iii.)

Here, besides rousing still further the sensual elements in his imagination and giving them added keenness in the barbed sneer of his concluding remark, Iago touches Othello at his most vulnerable point: he offends him in his personal respect. His reaction is a characteristic mixture of pathetic bewilderment and defiant self-esteem. Conscious of the racial difference which separates him from the Venetians around

him and vaguely suspicious of a mortifying intellectual inferiority—

> Haply, for I am black,
> And have not those soft parts of conversation,
> That chamberers have—

he thrusts aside the doubt that assails him in the man of action's superior reference to 'chamberers', only to fall at once into a further uncertainly of a more concrete and, perhaps, for him of a more mortifying kind—

> . . . or, for I am declined
> Into the vale of years.

The instinctive reaction—'yet that's not much'— is not sufficient to undo the final impression of failure, openly recognized in the conclusion—

> I am abused, and my relief
> Must be to loathe her—

in which misery and outraged self-respect compete for precedence. Iago's very boldness, in fact, has won its point. He must have been very sure of the Moor's blindness to work upon him with such a gross caricature, but his confidence has been justified by the event. For the caricature, for all its grossness, has roused, not Othello's indignation, but his outraged self-esteem; and the grossness of his approach has brought to the surface the destructive forces of his neglected animal instincts.

The increasing insolence—one can call it nothing else—of Iago's comments as he comes to realize that his success is assured is most notable. It is, indeed, an outstanding element in his whole strategy and singularly adapted to the weakness of his victim. Perhaps the irony reaches its climax when the plotter makes his victim stand aside and assist in silence at what he imagines to be Cassio's account of Desdemona's infidelity (IV. i.). Every word is a mortal wound for Othello's pride. Iago sneers, and disclaims the sneer with a phrase that is itself an affirmation of contempt:

> OTHELLO: Dost thou mock me?
> IAGO: I mock you! no, by heaven,
> Would you would bear your fortune *like a man*!

He roundly taxes the heroic Othello with lack of manliness:

> Whilst you were here o'erwhelmed with your grief—
> *A passion most unsuiting such a man*—
> Cassio came hither . . .
> . . . Marry, patience;
> Or I shall say you are all in all in spleen,
> *And nothing of a man.*

He throws Desdemona's supposed conduct into her duped husband's face, insisting upon the time, the place, the circumstances, and even the future repetition of the betrayal; the bestiality and degradation associated by Iago with the physical act is brought vividly before his eyes by the coarse verb 'cope' with which it is described:

> I will make him tell the tale anew,
> Where, how, how oft, how long ago and when
> He hath and is again to cope your wife.[4]

Nothing could do more than this savage element of caricature in Iago's treatment of Othello to convey the degradation of the victim; no better foil to the Moor's earlier rhetoric—rhetoric which stands in the closest relationship to the subsequent tragedy—could be conceived.

A few phrases from Iago, and Othello has worked himself up into an absolute slavery to passion. Iago himself, in a solitary moment, describes perfectly his own method and achievement:

> The Moor already changes with my poison:
> Dangerous conceits are in their nature poisons:
> Which at the first are scarce found to distaste,
> But with a little act upon the blood
> Even like the mines of sulphur. (III. iii.)

The relation of poison to taste, and of both to the action of the 'blood', is by now familiar. It describes the process by which Othello's egoism is reduced to incoherence. He now sees himself, in his imagination, betrayed and it is the knowledge, rather than the betrayal, which affects him:

> I had been happy, if the general camp,
> Pioners and all, had tasted her sweet body,
> *So I had nothing known.* (III. iii.)

The form of this confession is highly revealing. The problem of *Othello* is the problem of consciousness, of the relationship of instinctive life to critical detachment. It is precisely because knowledge, reason, is in *Othello* a destructive faculty at war with heroic simplicity that the tragedy takes place. By the end of this crucial scene Othello's new 'knowledge' has had two consequences. It has destroyed the simplicity upon which his real nobility had been based, and it has roused his own sensual impulses to a destructive fury. Sensual passion and prowess in action are, in Othello, mutually exclusive; the entry of the one implies the dissolution of the coherence and self-confidence necessary to the other. The very man who had once declared that 'the young effects' of sensuality were in him defunct now breaks out into the poignancy and physical intensity of the phrase '*tasted* her *sweet* body'. But it is significant that when he becomes aware that his peace is hopelessly undermined he refers to his loss, not first of Desdemona, but of his own integrity as a warrior. On the one hand, the loss of his military prowess in action:

> Farewell the tranquil mind, farewell content!
> Farewell the plumed troop, and the big wars
> That make ambition virtue. (III. iii.)

on the other, that sense of Desdemona's supposed promiscuity which grows upon him until Iago can make the ironic comment—'I see, sir, you are eaten up with passion'! Othello's further history is no more than the aggravation of the condition here defined.

[4] Compare, just above:—

IAGO: Lie—
OTHELLO: With her?
IAGO: With her, on her; what you will.

The scene we have been considering forms a kind of pivot upon which the whole subsequent action turns. At the end of it Othello's fate is sealed, and we have only to trace the growth in him of destructive animal feeling and the crumbling into futility of his personal pride. As it closes Othello abjures love and invokes vengeance in a speech which reveals the changing temper of his emotions:

> Like to the Pontic sea,
> Whose icy current and compulsive course
> Ne'er feels retiring ebb, but keeps due on
> To the Proprontic and the Hellespont;
> Even so my bloody thoughts, with violent pace,
> Shall ne'er look back, ne'er ebb to humble love,
> Till that a capable and wide revenge
> Swallow them up. Now, by yond marble heaven,
> In the due reverence of a sacred vow,
> I here engage my words. (III. iii.)

The full rhetoric so typical of the character is still present in the ample opening gesture of the speech; but the power by which Othello is brought to imagine the Pontic sea in its irresistible course is the rising 'violent' power of 'blood', abjuring love—by a vital contradiction—and dedicating itself—but in the fulness of a passion frozen into an '*icy* current'—to revenge. Iago's preceding comment—'your mind perhaps may change'—is, as usual, perfectly timed to rouse the opposite reaction in Othello. Thwarted in love, his egoism will be consistent in revenge, decisive, irresistible: all the intensity of sensual feeling which was never fully gratified in his relations with Desdemona is now to be exercised in exacting retribution for the ruin of his integrity. The type of passion so notably absent from his declarations of love (or at least so constrained in their expression) reveals itself in a craving for destruction which Iago's activity ceaselessly nourishes.

As the plot advances, and Iago's control over Othello grows, the element of 'blood' which had once been lacking in the expression of his love makes a disturbing appearance—disturbing because it does not come to give warmth and embodiment to his passion, but rather appears as an acute and terrible repulsion against all contacts of the body. The later stages in Othello's downfall are no more than a dramatic representation of the attitude towards love expressed by Emilia in terms significantly reminiscent once more of *Troilus*—

> 'T is not a year or two shows us a man:
> They are all stomachs and we all but food;
> They eat us hungerly, and when they are full
> They belch us. (III. iv.)

and brought by Iago to their logical conclusion in action. At his very next appearance the disintegration of Othello's personality assumes even more ominous forms. He dwells immediately upon the 'moistness' of Desdemona's hand, which—he says—'argues fruitfulness and liberal heart', and upon the rebellious desire which he discerns in it:

> For here's a young and sweating devil here,
> That commonly rebels.

And, as he becomes more and more obsessed by these things, the crumbling of his self-esteem is increasingly apparent. Those around

him begin to comment upon the loss of his former equanimity. Iago looks back ironically into the past and compares his present state with the calmness of his behaviour under the cannon, 'when it hath blown his ranks into the air'. Desdemona refers more directly to the confusion, whose cause is still obscure to her, in his spirit:

> Some unhatch'd practice
> Made demonstrable here in Cyprus to him,
> Hath *puddled* his *clear* spirit.

Simplicity, once the pride of his 'clear' spirit, is now muddied over, obscurely 'puddled' by perverse and uncontrolled emotion. The poison inserted by Iago has not yet broken out, but it is evidently festering within. In the following scenes the action of jealousy, the monster 'begot upon itself' (III. iv.), turns openly and apparently inward to destroy the self. We see and feel its effects upon the once dominating warrior when he falls into a fit and mumbles frenziedly, in the presence of the mocking and exultant Iago, about 'Noses, ears and lips!' (IV. i.). We feel them in those bestial phrases in which his outraged egoism gropes towards its revenge: 'I'll tear her all to pieces' (III. iii.); 'I see that nose of your, but not that dog I shall throw it to' (IV. i.), and still more in the combination of affronted self-respect and rising savagery which prompts the exclamation: 'I will chop her into messes; cuckold me'; (IV. i.). But they appear most clearly of all, and in clear relation to the love they are corroding, in that terrible scene (IV. ii.) in which the crazed Othello turns, with a mixture of intense physical attraction and open repulsion upon Desdemona. The feeling in that scene—it is important to note—is very reminiscent of the Sonnets. Desdemona is a '*rose*-lipp'd cherubin'—such imagery, a compound of poetic convention and deep emotion, is characteristic—and Othello's loathing is expressed in typical sense-imagery:

> DESDEMONA: I hope my noble lord esteems me honest.
> OTHELLO: O, ay; as summer flies are in the shambles,
> That quicken even with blowing. O, thou weed,
> Who art so lovely fair and smell'st so sweet
> That the sense aches at thee, would thou hadst ne'er been born!

The mention of 'weed', the reminiscence of convention behind 'lovely fair', and the keen evocation—almost unnaturally sensitive—of the faculty of smell are all suggestive of the Sonnets. Like 'lilies that fester', their effect depends upon a sharp opposition of acute sense-impressions. The intensity of desire implied in 'sense aches at thee' and the feeling for life behind 'quicken' are set against the loathing which produced 'shambles' and the 'blowing' of the flies. 'Blowing' is especially subtle in that it speaks of the generation of flies out of corruption whilst using a word that suggests the opening of the rose-bud into mature beauty. The reminiscence of the Sonnets is not accidental, for the story of *Othello* is precisely a dramatic representation of the inevitable degeneration, in a world where 'value' has no foundation, of desire into selfish and destructive 'appetite'. The whole

speech shows the Moor's passion, still present and insistent even in his denunciation, turning to corruption in contact with the canker of Iago's cynicism.

This surrender to bestiality involves the collapse of Othello's integrity as a person. He expresses himself, as I have suggested, most confidently in the egoistic poetry of war; and it is significant that his acceptance of Iago's insinuations is regarded by him as tantamount to a renunciation of his prowess as a soldier. The comments of those who surround him in the last stage of the play, and particularly of Lodovico (IV. i.), insist upon the loss of sufficiency, of the mastery over passion which had always characterized Othello as a warrior:

> Is this the noble Moor, whom our full senate
> Call all in all sufficient? This the nature
> Whom passion could not shake?

Yet, in spite of Iago's reply: 'He is much changed', that sufficiency had itself an egoistic basis which exposure to unfamiliar circumstances has simply brought to the surface. As his ruin proceeds, the egoism which had always been a part of the character comes more and more to the fore, not now in connection with military glory, but rather in his attitude to his own folly. In the last scene, this folly is completely unmasked. Emilia addresses him as 'dull Moor', and his own comment is as simple as it is true—'O fool, fool, fool'! Yet, in spite of all his folly, his egoism remains, and with it a considerable degree of tragic dignity. The weakness and the tragedy stand, in fact, in the closest relationship. The great speeches in which he attains tragic stature by expressing his 'nobility' are, at the same time, merciless exposures of weakness. In the first of them, made by Othello to Desdemona, what emerges above all is the unpreparedness of the speaker to meet the situation in which he finds himself. Had life presented to Othello a problem which could have been met by the active creation of a nobility at once true and flattering to the self-esteem all—we are told —would have been well:

> Had it pleased heaven
> To try me with affliction,

he begins, and in cataloguing the forms which that affliction might have taken we feel the speaker recovering confidence, assuring himself that in resistance too there is a kind of heroism, that the exercise of patience to the limit of endurance is not incompatible with his conception of his own moral dignity. It is only in the latter part of the speech that we are shown the true source of Othello's suffering:

> . . . but, alas, to make me
> A fixed figure for the time of scorn
> To point his slow, unmoving finger at. (IV. ii.)

To become an object of ridicule without being able to react, to assert his own 'nobility'—this is the shame from which Othello feels that there is no escape, and which accompanies him to his tragic end.

That ends adds little that is new to our knowledge of his character. As T. S. Eliot has noted Othello's last speech is more than a piece of

splendid, self-centred poetry (though it is most certainly that); it is also the dupe's attempt at self-justification in an irrelevant pose:

> I have done the state some service and they know't . . .
> . . . then must you speak
> Of one that loved not wisely but too well;
> Of one not easily jealous, but, being wrought,
> Perplexed in the extreme. (V. ii.)

Who, in point of fact, has ever been more easily jealous than Othello? It is, we feel, splendid declamation; but it is also largely beside the point. For the real point lies in the presence, as Othello speaks, of Desdemona's body, killed by the speaker himself in his own blindness, and the speech is not only 'poetry' but the revelation of a character. 'Perplexed', betrayed by emotions whose presence and complexity he has never really grasped, Othello's last words are a pathetic return to his original simplicity of nature. Unable to cope effectively with the complicated business of living, he recalls his generous past, and commits the simple act of suicide. But already the critical acid applied by Iago has completely destroyed the structure of his greatness.

I have attempted by analysis to bring out the advance in Shakespeare's dramatic power represented by *Othello*. His control of the intrigue is far more complete than it had ever been in the 'problem' plays. In *Hamlet* and *Measure for Measure* plot and poetry are still comparatively separate entities; Hamlet's soliloquies are imperfectly fused with the rather disjointed action of the play, and the Duke's function vacillates between the engineering of the plot and the resolution of its problems in terms of poetic 'symbolism'. *Othello* is very different. The process by which Iago undermines Othello's confidence is perfectly reflected in the corrupting entry of his cynical, destructive 'blood'-imagery into his victim's noble but self-contained poetry. Plot and imagery, dramatic development and poetic expression are, in fact, fused as never before. It is significant that this growth in control over material corresponds to a clearer distinction between the conflicting emotions whose projection into opposed characters is the chief feature of the play. We might even say, using the terms with all the necessary caution, that there can be traced in *Othello* the beginnings of the process by which the contrasted attitudes to experience simultaneously present in the imagery of the sonnets and 'problem' plays are eventually separated out into an opposition of 'good' and 'evil'. The words 'good' and 'evil' are, of course implied, not stated, and are therefore to be read with care. The most that we can securely say is that 'evil' is connected with the element of frustration, of disharmony in the 'problem' plays, and 'good' with the full, balanced ordering of poetic experience which eventually produced *Antony and Cleopatra* and the final comedies. *Othello,* of course, is still far from any such ordering. The prevailing tenour of the play is still destructive; so much so, I think, that it is lacking in proper moral balance and does not give complete satisfaction as a work of art. But, in spite of all the inter-relation of imagery, Iago is felt to be definitely opposed to Othello in the dramatic scheme; and all the 'perilous stuff', the doubts,

maladies and contradictions which had been simultaneously present in many of the Sonnets and so exercised the protagonists of the 'problem' plays by the impossibility of separating them, are now isolated in his character. For Othello, in spite of all his shortcomings, is connected with love and natural emotions; and there is nothing grudging about the nobility which Shakespeare confers upon him at his best moments. Iago, on the other hand, is felt, for all his superior 'intelligence', to be at once limited and evil; in fact, he is Shakespeare's personal development of the conventional 'Machiavellian' villain of the stage. Within the unity still (as always) imposed by subtly related imagery, we are for the first time in reach of the decisive orientation of Shakespearean good and evil in *Macbeth*.

DEATH IN SPRING

Spring is old, yet she walks in the nursery fold
Where young lambs cry
For milk and mercy piteously.
How should they know who are so small
That last year's lambs by the sheepfold wall
Are their old grey dams today?

But the lamb I held awhile
Has found a whiter fold than mother's arms.
O, childless Spring, though bearing green and gold,
How cold you come to me!

I bear an ancient sorrow of the earth—
A death in Spring.
And though the day draws breath
With bud and bird and creatures of the sun,
I see dark shadows cross the evening fields
That are plaited round with thorns,
And crowned with stars.

PHOEBE HESKETH

GRIM AND GLOOMY

A poem for children

Oh, grim and gloomy,
So grim and gloomy
Are the caves beneath the sea.
Oh, rare but roomy
And bare and boomy
Those salt sea caverns be.

Oh, slim and slimy
Or grey and grimy
Are the animals of the sea.
Salt and oozy
And safe and snoozy
The caves where those animals be.

Hark to the shuffling
Huge and snuffling
Ravenous, cavernous great sea-beasts!
But fair and fabulous
Tintinnabulous
Gay and fabulous are their feasts.

Ah, but the Queen of the Sea,
The querulous, perilous sea!
How the curls of her tresses,
The pearls on her dresses
Sway and swirl in the waves!
How cosy and dozy,
How sweet ring-a-rosy
Her bower in the deep sea caves!

Oh, rare but roomy
And bare and boomy
Those caverns under the sea!
And grave and grandiose,
Safe and sandiose
The dens of her denizens be.

JAMES REEVES

THE SIX DAYS OF CREATION

ELIZABETH SEWELL

NOW that I have undertaken this thing, I shall write nothing except in the evenings, and then only this short-lived journal, written on scraps of paper, the backs of old letters, notices from societies, examination lists. The better paper must be kept for better things, for my proper work and for poems, if I am ever going to write any again after this week. But a diary is scrappy and formless in any case, and these rough sheets, manv with torn edges, suit me well enough.

Nothing much has happened as yet, and the evening and the morning of the first day find me not greatly altered. When I woke up this morning, I remembered at the moment my mind became conscious that it was to begin to-day, but there was no accompaniment of shock. The only sign of reaction was the development of a slight but quite perceptible ache in the stomach about ten minutes after waking. This vanished when I got up and had other things to think about. It was a very ordinary morning. I washed and dressed as usual, then ran downstairs to answer the bell which was ringing and ringing down below and getting no response. It was the postman, with a registered letter for the family who live up above me. I took it in and signed for it, then brought in the milk and carried theirs and mine upstairs, as I usually do. All these things are quite unimportant; but that is why I talk about them, and shall go on doing so. I want to bear witness that life is still going on, reliable and normal. That comforts me.

I think I had perhaps imagined that this thing I have embarked on would demand all my time and attention, as if I had to go into retreat for a week and let it have its course. I see now that this is not so. When I had eaten my breakfast this morning and washed up and made my bed, I did not have to sit down in my armchair, fold my hands and say, as if to a Celestial Dentist, 'Very well. I am ready now. Please begin.' I did some reading, went out for lunch, gave B. a coaching, and so on through the usual run of a day. I am not sick, in any ordinary sense of the word, and so do not have to put myself out of action, lying in lukewarm inertia so that mind and body may devote themselves to the cherishing of the disease, helping it to thrive and burgeon and so attain its natural decay. I have indeed scarcely had a quiet moment to-day; but the thing, I know, has begun.

The signs of it are small so far. I shall note them down. They are, first, a growing difficulty in concentrating for long on intellectual things and work; second, a sudden attachment to objects, insignificant in themselves—to a vase of flowers under the reading lamp, or the

shiny green china in the glass-fronted cupboard; third, the increasing refusal of the eyes to take in what they see before them, so obsessed is the mind becoming with what is going on behind the eyes themselves. I shall not dwell upon the sense of excitement and foreboding. That was to be expected, and is probably unimportant.

What is going on behind the eyes—now that I have written those words, I see that they are the key phrase in this first contribution to this journal. I shall not, however, go into that more closely yet. This extraordinary experiment, now beginning, only half possesses me to-night, so that I can still look at myself, almost with compassion—not self-pity but as one might say to another, 'Lay your head down, it will ease you against what is to come'. I can still carry this head of mine, the subject and seat of this whole process, with a pitying care, and will lay it so on its pillow to-night. Tomorrow this will probably no longer be possible.

* * *

And the evening and the morning were the first day.

* * *

N. came in this evening and spent a long time talking about himself, as he often does. We drank a lot of coffee, so that now I am over-wakeful, sitting here in the armchair close against the gas-fire. I began about nine o'clock this evening to feel I might need help before the week is out. It is disturbing to find this sign of weakness so early. At least there is this to be said, that whatever I feel about it, I am most unlikely to receive help from anybody. From N.? He looked at me to-night and said, 'I wish I had your peace of mind'. From my elders and betters here? Or the local vicar? They would think me mad. I think it myself, increasingly.

To-night I can hold out against it no longer. The process is some thirty-six hours old, and the sense of destruction inside the head is so strong that I could believe that all the brain tissues had dissolved, and there was nothing now inside my head but running blood, a waste of dark and clotted waters. Now N. has gone, I can sit here quietly and hold one hand over my forehead and eyes and take note of the state of the universe which is inside my head.

The walls of the skull are standing up to it well. If the pressure grows much greater, I cannot answer for what will happen, but at present there is as far as eye can see no crack in the vast black hollow of night sky formed by the inner walls of my skull. They arch over immensely high, and then run curving down to a black horizon. And here between them, this wilderness of black waters drifting and caught up into a smoke of clouds, this sooty vacuum with nodes of yet blacker nebulæ in a great emptiness of water and air, swamped and formless—this is the floor and bed of my brain, that once held a lighted mind and is now dissolving. If I were to ask: Where am I myself in all this? the answer could only be nowhere. There is only one thing I can be sure of, that this is my skull that I can feel from the outside with the tips of my fingers, but, within, housing this monstrous

experiment, a solid tangible cave of bone containing within it the matter of creation, a universe which in a few hours has dissolved into primal chaos and the watery and tempestuous darkness that existed before the world was.

Each brain cavity must hold a universe inside it. *That* at least is nothing strange, and I make myself remember it every so often, just as I have to remember now to eat at the appropriate times, when the hands of my little Swiss alarm clock point so or so. Each skull walls in a world with its planets and all the swinging stars. One would cherish it in another. It is one of the most ordinary and happy gestures of love to lay both hands on either side of the beloved's head, as if to salute the particular universe hidden by those fragile rounded walls. But my own universe, furnished out with space and stars and bright with sun and shadow, has been touched by other hands, and has guttered down into primeval darkness and a weltering firmament of Seven Seas. Were these the hands of love, not laid on a head in tenderness or blessing but breaking in with violence, drawing up the hollow of the brain in their relentless palms as a child scoops up handfuls of puddled sand salt with the sea, enormous hands whose very shadow ploughs up the quiet arena of the mind like the thunder of chariots and horsemen, but without lightning and without rain?

Forgive me for asking. One should not put such questions, above all, not now. I must get up out of this chair and tidy the room and put my things ready for to-morrow, and perhaps eat a biscuit out of the blue tin with the galleon painted on the lid. There is nothing I can do to still the fermenting chaos and germination in my head. But even so, I am responsible for it, and undue weariness will be no help. It is past midnight in any case.

* * *

And the evening and the morning were the second day.

* * *

I never thought it would be like this. They speak of it so lightly here. 'Literary creation,' they say, or 'the creative mind', word after word falling pat out of their heads and slipping off their tongues, and everybody listening politely, impressed. What can they have inside those heads of theirs that they mint these words so easily? If they knew anything of it, they would have learned, as I shall have learned if I survive, that words have nothing to do with it. Admittedly I am still writing this account in words, but that too has as little significance now as the reflex action of a muscle in some mortally wounded creature. Words are presumably intended to mediate between a mind, a universe and other minds. But the universe inside my head has ousted all the words; and as for other minds, they would babble to me of 'creation'. Let them try it, that's all. Let them too declare themselves ready to have a universe remade inside their heads, and see what happens. '*See* what happens' indeed, for only pictures could convey it. I shall try to set it down, but only because of this clinging to belief in the possibility of communication of some kind. But how

can one express this wholesale process of annihilation in words? Did they, the handlers of words, know that the process of creation means in the first place the breaking up of the universe in violent disorder, and possession by all the forces of chaos? I certainly did not, though I know it now. But they believe it to be something that can be discussed, politely, in the classroom, and so can be no help in this extremity, which is neither polite nor expressible. The only ones who might understand would, I think, be a soul only just dead or a woman who had just lain with a man for the first time. It is as intimate and violent and terrible as that, but prolonged almost beyond endurance. There must, here as there, be a farther side where a return to wholeness and order is possible. But three days have gone now, and this universe of my brain which I have delivered into remaking hands, deliberately, is in a chaos from which there might well be no returning, beyond the reach even of God.

My eyes have before them the cheerful colours of my books on their white shelf, the untidy table, the tiny green dots, not round but diamond-shaped if you look at them carefully, on the wall-paper. But one thing and one only presents itself to my vision—this wild darkness on the great waters. The night is sulphurous, and, like soot on Portland stone, the fumes have begun to eat away the arch of bone formed by my forehead above these commingling oceans of cloud and of black or livid water. Instead of the smooth vaulting of calcium that a skull should form, mine is corroded now into splintery islands and archipelagoes in the sky, pinpoint Pleiades that stab the whirlpools of the storms. The upper darkness bears down upon the lower, through all the pressure points afforded by the great black columns that run between the firmament above and that beneath. Waterspouts perhaps? They hold the two great surfaces apart, desperately, waltzing in agony as black basaltic pillars might shift and sidle in perpetual earth tremors. The leaden rooftree of the universe inside my head bears down with all its appalling weight, and only these despairing arms, like giant caryatides in embryo, hold it up and keep it from collapsing; for then the head would cave in, and there would be one vast and final shower of fragments on to the bed of the dying mind, splinters of bone and a spatter of blood and brains while the broken waterspouts brought down the stars in a great burst of laughter.

I almost wish it would happen. It would be a relief. I understand now why Samson pulled that huge stone vaulting down about his ears, for he too must have known a moment such as this, the eyes as bloodshot as the palace windows at Gaza, the apertures of the head running with a blackened discharge and the pressure tightening and tightening. I thought it was darkness that was running down my upper lip and mouth and chin, but I see from my handkerchief that it is only blood. Something has broken. It might be an artery punctured in the head or the pillars of the mind split into green-stick fractures, or the dislodging of the starry keystone of the arch of

my skull. But I see it is not. It is none of these that is broken. It is I myself.

* * *

And the evening and the morning were the third day.

* * *

I am too battered to think. Mercifully there has been little to do to-day—only one class, some books to be returned, a meal to cook. There is nothing more that needs be done now, and I can sit quietly, the drawn curtains shutting out the noise of the traffic outside, and can abandon myself to my real state, drifting like a drowned thing on waters that are subsiding but still as restless as the sea after a great storm. Everlastingly there is this catch of the breath, as if after tears, only then there is nothing, the wave folds over, slapping down upon itself, and the floating body, face upwards to a grey and uncertain sky, can continue rocking, no jerk or twist or irony of the sea violating its deathly relaxation.

This is not happiness, for there seems no spirit here to feel it. It is not peace, for the universe is troubled and formless still. It is not beauty or satisfaction. It is only that something is dead, and the dead must toss on the waters of uncertainty some ages longer, lapped by the mud suspended in the thick oceans, the remains of the granite cliffs of the skull, I suppose, now worn away by storms just past.

Only a sense of spaciousness remains. The bounds of the mind, be they of shaped bone or of less certain barriers erected in the name of order, have gone, and the contents of the head have flooded out to infinity, bearing with them this corpse afloat in mid-ocean, too negative to need a shore, knowing nothing of bearings or landfall. It is suspended in space-time as a new world might be in the grey twilight of a half-made universe. For if something is dead, something is in the making. I am too exhausted to think what; indeed, I could scarcely manage the three hundred yards walk from my room to the library this morning, and had to sit down on the low wall fronting the next door garden until I knew that I was not going to faint but would be able to climb my three flights of stairs. This does not matter. There is only one thing that matters now, and that is not this dead thing drifting, nor the mind dissolved, nor the limitless spread of grey sky and grey sea. What matters is patience. This is the one virtue, which even so unformed a thing as I can practice, the all-in-all to which fulness will be added, but later. The uneasy derelict washing to and fro in the still-troubled water knows no future and possesses neither dignity nor peace; but if only patience can be preserved, something of these will be given back. So, to practice this very thing, my pencil has covered, unbeautifully and in an unusually laboured hand, these pages to-night.

* * *

And the evening and the morning were the fourth day.

* * *

It was not until halfway through to-day that I realized how

dangerous this exhaustion might be. Extreme tiredness induces a sense of timelessness; but I know it must have been about three o'clock in the afternoon, because I was sitting on the stone steps at the back of the house, in the sun, looking at the garden. I was beginning to be almost happy, a thing so strange as to be nearly unbelievable, and was letting myself rest in the tides of faint sunlight, rocking to and fro, half asleep, breathing with the breathing of the water. I knew that I lay drowned thousands of fathoms deep in some original sea. My world was green, green as a green garden, and I lay at the bottom of it, my hair after its long submerging grown to seaweed and sown with sand and seed-pearls, my skin stroked by the chords and bubbles of the working seas, and I myself flooded by the inertia of great masses of water, as if Tuscarora Deep itself lay heavy upon me, and I desiring nothing now but to be left in peace. I would have left my universe so, having nothing from now on but a submarine world, reality to be no more than peacock-shadows in the clouded green waters. I would have been my own Lost Atlantis, the mind a sunken ruin, with the bells in broken towers tolling at the chance movements of the deep sea currents, and nothing but drowsiness and dreams to be had out of it all. Such was the universe at three o'clock inside my head to-day; but already by a quarter past it was no longer so.

They say life began in the sea. I wonder if there was at the beginning the same resistance to it as I discovered, a voice crying from the matrix of the sea-bed, 'Let me alone—why must I be troubled to awake and live?' But the impulse that roused the protest was very indistinct at first, a change in the quality of the light perhaps, or a new thread of cold in the moving air. It penetrated even to where I lay drowned, long harpstring arpeggios of sunlight, a music to curdle the water into milky jade, and the bells of Atlantis swung round in it to ring a new world in. I could have wept, but to say 'Shut your ears' is senseless when harp and bells and all the waters that thrill and shiver to them are inside the head. They began to string my universe together, pulling taut the shafts of light and the currents of water and the crystalline solutions of my mind. I and the universe were drawn slowly into one again, fibre by fibre. The waters could not hold against it; they began to retreat, and with a vast effort, a cataclysm of effort and desperation, something began to emerge.

I wondered for a little what it was. It seemed so strange that there could ever be anything solid and new again that I needed time to take it in. In the end, I saw it must be a head, or a headland perhaps, showing above the water. I saw my own body being slowly built up, pebble by pebble, along the curves of a shore. This is the edge of something; most of it is unknown as yet, but at least a world and a mind, both of them mine, I think, have risen out of the waters, though we are still too new, and dripping wet. The water has polished all the little shining edges of the shingle, and I can taste the salt if I lick the back of my hand. Even the paper on which I am writing

this seems damp. But the waters will not pass their bounds again, and world and mind wait to know themselves and one another better.

* * *

And the evening and the morning were the fifth day.

* * *

It has been raining all to-day. I can still hear it now, showering down the long panes of my window behind the brown velvet curtains, a lovely sound on a warm evening. It was so blessed to be out in the rain to-day. I could have stood in it for hours, feeling it wash off me all the stickiness and salt of the waters of chaos. It came down steadily, untormented by the wind, running down one's face and into one's mouth, tasting sweet as it must have tasted to the leaves, lime and chestnut and sycamore, porous with heat, which have fledged the universe almost overnight. I bought a bunch of brown wall-flowers in the market, to bring back with me. The universe grows lovely things. Perhaps some day I shall understand it all a little better.

What am I to make of these six days? Perhaps nothing yet; there may have been enough making for the time being. Whether this is to happen every time I undertake a biggish piece of work is more than I can tell. It may, I suppose. But I think now that behind everything I write there will always be the potentiality—not necessarily the reality but the potentiality—of this abyss of transformation.

The wall-flowers smell most sweetly in their green jug. I see now that I was wrong to be afraid. I should have known that no matter how deep and total the process of creation, one could not make a universe better than, or even different from, the works of God. There could be only one result: that one would be given back oneself and one's own inner universe, new certainly but in no way unfamiliar.

I shall draw a line now, slow and unhurried, under this six-day account, to mark the end. But after the line is drawn I shall go on sitting here for some long time, because the things in this universe are now so old and new that they have become a source of great strangeness, so that I wonder at the cupboards and the bookshelves and the cups and saucers and the sound of the rain outside. I wonder too, without arrogance and with a great amazement, at myself.

* * *

And the evening and the morning were the sixth day.

REVIEWERS

Those who have contributed 'selected notices' to the Volume VI of *The Wind and the Rain* include: J. M. Cameron, Morwenna Donnelly, Donald Nicholl, Hermann Peschmann and the Editor.

IV. F. R. LEAVIS AND SOME OTHER CRITICS

'Blame-All and Praise-All are two blockheads.'—Benjamin Franklin

Had the author of *Poor Richard* published his book two hundred years later in 1934, he might well have added a third to his pair of blockheads—Know-All. For the criticism with which English readers were faced in the 'thirties may be said to have resolved itself into three groups in the popular mind. There was the School of Know-All in which the most obvious platitudes were presented daily in the press and received with the awe that attends a conjuror producing the expected rabbit from a hat: there was the School of Praise-All (subsidised by the various book clubs) whose function was to extend the province of blurb-writing from dust-jackets to the columns of the more fashionable weeklies: there was the School of Blame-All which consisted of those critics whose integrity and realization of their vocation as critics did not permit them to hail the birth of a masterpiece hourly. This, it may be objected, is to overstate the case: but some such over-emphasis is necessary if one is to explain why at the end of the 'forties what appeared as mere groupings of critical opinions during the 'thirties, now in 1950 appear as clear-cut divisions *in the popular mind.* The clue is to be found in that last phrase. For if one accepts the axiom that a concern for standards in the arts implies a concern for standards in living, one has but to glance about to see how the cataloguing mentality of age groups and intelligence tests have become the *sine qua non* of the Welfare State to have answered one's question. A desire for free milk for school children has its parallel in the world of books—a desire for a lacteal fare of light reading which may, alternatively, titillate and charm. On all sides one sees the onus of individual responsibility being transferred to the state, so that it has been seriously suggested that publishers, like any other manufacturers, should be state-subsidised. Yet, rightly understood, publishing, like writing criticism, is a vocation, and one has only to note the names of the more established firms to realize how in the past this has been so. However, to-day it is beginning to be otherwise: with the growth of the Civil Service beyond all sensible proportions one also notes in the world of letters the rise of the middlemen—middlemen whose purpose it is, acting as either buyers or reviewers, to monitor public opinion; to decide that what they *like* shall be the criteria by which the public shall *judge.* It is a form of commercial discrimination.

The result of such discrimination has meant that the acceptance of literature as something born of the spirit, as a defence of language (and hence indirectly of life's meaning), has become a matter of secondary worth in literary evaluation: instead everything has become focussed upon books which may be described as presenting 'slices of life', and whether such chronicles and sagas have been set in previous centuries has mattered little so long as the tone in which they have been recorded has been contemporary. In other words so long as the characters could be taken as recognizable 'types' it has not mattered whether these characters or their authors have had any awareness of the possibilities of life; and all too often, like the readers for whose consumption these books have been produced, the reactions to life of both their authors and characters have been those of 'dumb oxen'. Their tales have signified nothing: only the sound and fury created about them by their different publicity machines has remained.

To those who have read thus far it will be apparent that this diagnosis is very similar to that of F. R. Leavis, as has been carried out in his own books and his quarterly review, *Scrutiny*: in fact the terminology has very largely been made out of phrases which owed their first statement to Leavis. For it must be said that although his work has won recognition in a few circles, it is still comparatively little known. On the university level, as an outsider, one has the impression that there is a certain conspiracy against the method of Leavis's evaluation of literature; and on the more general level it is men such as Lionel Hale or Ralph Strauss, or women such as Elizabeth Bowen or Pamela Hansford Johnson, who have won golden opinions as critics of perception so far as fiction is concerned (though one would be glad to know

with regard to the latter two what exactly it is they are so 'perceptive' of. For even as practising novelists, let alone as reviewers, it would seem that much of the feminine psychology for which they have been praised is an invented psychology). Finally, notwithstanding these factors which have, as it were, obscured F. R. Leavis's position in English criticism, one must add that the impact of his writing has been much greater than one might at first imagine.

In his fight for standards and defence of values, many of Leavis's critical canons have been accepted without formal acknowledgement:[1] for, in a sense, his criticism has been the re-statement of the obvious because during the last quarter of a century since he has been writing there has been a tendency to cultivate critical slickness in which the clever comment is always preferred to the more truthful, and perhaps more obvious, statement of fact. So it is that the restoration of obvious truths about literature for which Leavis is responsible has often been taken for granted and his early pioneer work been forgotten. Yet it is not so much the neglect that he has suffered which is the concern of this review-article as the varying attacks which his pronouncements have caused. Here is one typical such comment from *The Criterion* (January, 1937). Stephen Spender wrote there: 'Dr. Leavis seems not so much an example of the poet turned critic because he cannot write poetry as the critic turned lecturer and don because he cannot write criticism.' One may perhaps examine this charge in the light of Leavis's latest book, *The Great Tradition,* together with some recent numbers of *Scrutiny.*

The Great Tradition is a study of George Eliot, Henry James and Joseph Conrad: both Jane Austen and D. H. Lawrence whom Leavis admits as being writers in the great tradition of the English novel one hopes will be vouchsafed a separate volume later.

The book opens with a short survey of the novel during the Eighteenth Century. In it Leavis comments: 'To be important historically is not, of course, to be necessarily one of the significant few. Fielding deserves the place of importance given to him in the literary histories, but he hasn't the kind of classical distinction which we are also invited to credit him with. He is important not because he leads to Mr. J. B. Priestley but because he leads to Jane Austen, to appreciate whose distinction is to feel that life isn't long enough to permit one's giving much time to Fielding or any to Mr. Priestley.' The point is well made and characteristic of all Leavis's work: yet it is precisely pronouncements of this nature which have caused Leavis to be taken to task. For instance in a number of the early notices which met the publication of *The Great Tradition* it was argued that Leavis had been unjust to the Eighteenth Century novelists, and such arguments were advanced precisely by that kind of writer of the school of Praise-All who is incapable of discriminating between the achievement of Jane Austen, Virginia Woolf or Rosamond Lehmann. One suspected that their wrath was caused because, having read Fielding and Richardson early in their twenties, their impression of these writers (whilst they themselves had turned forty) was still that of young undergraduates. An impression rather than a re-reading being their criterion, they were angered to find that the idols of their youth had been evaluated and not merely eulogised. Again it is precisely that human awareness which the great novelist can promote which is a quality that most contemporary 'literary' critics seem incapable of assessing because their standards are static: their standards once formulated (i.e. early in their twenties) they fail to realize that every book read—in fact every sentence carefully read and pondered—means a certain modification of all previous literary judgements; that there must be a continual re-orientation taking place in criticism because 'standards are formed in comparison'. To paraphrase Leavis's comments: Fielding leads to Jane Austen. Yet one has to admit that, logical as Leavis's pronouncements are and backed up as his judgements

[1] G. Wilson Knight has suffered a similar fate. A study of his more recent writings will appear in a later issue.

are by a close attention to the text, his style is not easy to read. The use of colloquialisms like 'didn't' and the way in which he ends sentences with prepositions often make the writing seem graceless; and to this another censure must be added which affects his writing more in *Scrutiny* than it does in his actual books.

Constantly, reading his reviews in *Scrutiny*, one has the impression that a second hand has been at work; that the acid and bitter comments which are inter-jected here and there—though true in themselves—are not an integral part of his main argument. For example, his editorial remarks on the 'Poetry Prizes for the Festival of Britain, 1951'[2] though justified are set down in a somewhat crochety manner so that an outsider is tempted to think that the occasion has simply been selected as an excuse for having a personal dig at certain members of the Awards Panel: there is a note of bitterness which comes near to self-righteousness and the real point of his remarks—the fitness of this Panel for judging poetry—is consequently blurred. This is unfortunate and it is an unfortunate mannerism which is to be found in a number of Scrutineers. For often one feels that *Scrutiny* authors are no more than followers of F. R. Leavis; that they halt in their pen-ultimate paragraphs and say to themselves not 'Am I applying the standards of *Scrutiny* to this particular evaluation', but 'Am I writing as Mr. Leavis would write on this particular matter'. The result is a series of echoes: instead of becoming apostles, of applying standards and what has been termed 'sensibility values' in the light of their own independent reading, their essays and reviews never rise above the level of sixth-form writing; or, put another way, one might say that they read as the papers written for an examination when the candidates have already been warned who will be correcting their work. Yet, despite this limitation of his followers (for which Leavis can hardly be blamed), one must offset against it those Scrutineers who have stayed the course as independent thinkers and are amongst England's best critics to-day: one refers to L. C. Knights, Derek Traversi, Martin Turnell, D. J. Enright, John Speirs, James Smith and R. C. Churchill—a group which it is significant to note includes radicals and agnostics and Christians. Indeed here is the answer to partisan writing; to such Marxist criticism as that of Christopher Caudwell or Jack Lindsay, or such Anglican and Catholic campaigning as exhibited in the books of Edward Hutton and George Every. For in *Scrutiny*, as in no other periodical in England to-day, does one find the great tradition of English criticism continued—a tradition that incorporates in the light of living experience all that is best in the work of Dr. Johnson, Coleridge and Mathew Arnold.

D. S. Savage has never contributed to *Scrutiny*; but there is much in his work which suggests that he is well qualified to be a Scrutineer. Moreover, one approaches his work in this somewhat indirect manner because as a critic Savage is bound by neither academic nor Bohemian ties and his work, if it is to be placed in a critical context, is nearest, because of its strict insistence on standards, to that of F. R. Leavis and the *Scrutiny* group. Indeed, the early reviews of *The Withered Branch* showed that in the public mind Savage, like Leavis, is believed to belong to the School of Blame-All. Certainly his 'Six studies in the Modern Novel' are strict and severe: nor are his views those which are either current or fashionable.

Again Savage, like Leavis, is not a graceful writer: he is fond of long words, especially words like 'concretize', and phrases such as 'capitalistic world' and 'existential orientation'. The result is that often—for on occasion such words and phrases may be permissible—the reader is glad of the relief of coming across passages cited from the novels of E. M. Forster and Virginia Woolf: they are so much easier to read and flow so much more freely than the textual criticism which surrounds them. This is unfortunate, because it distracts the reader from Savage's thesis and hence through sheer turgidness on the critic's part the reader's scales, sometimes, become unduly weighted in favour of the authors being examined.

[2] *Scrutiny*, Vol. XVI, No. 4; Winter, 1949.

The six novelists whom Savage discusses are Ernest Hemingway, E. M. Forster, Virginia Woolf, Aldous Huxley, Margiad Evans and James Joyce. With Hemingway, Huxley and Margiad Evans—the latter being an especially interesting choice—he is on firm ground: with Joyce and Virginia Woolf he is never less than interesting and often stimulating, though he makes the mistake of identifying these two authors too closely with their characters. However, he is best examined in the light of his study of Forster. It shows both the advantages and disadvantages of his critical method.

His thesis is that certain writers—the majority usually—allow their themes to take shape from 'the exteriorization of the inner conflict' (a typical phrase of the author's) rather than to proceed from an achieved centre of being. The difference is well exemplified in a contrast between the novels of François Mauriac and those of Forster. Whilst the former's plots can be said to have increased in scope—compare his *Baiser au Lépreux* (1923) with *La Pharisienne* (1943)—the latter reached a height of excellence early in his career from which he has not been able to develop. His creative efforts stopped in 1924 with *A Passage to India,* because he had, in fact, written himself out. The actions of his characters were conceived in a state of antecedent to full integration, so that as soon as the different subject matters which had accrued through his personal experience were exhausted, silence set in. As his friend, G. Lowes Dickinson, once declared: Forster's object as a novelist was to bring 'realistic life into contact with the background of value (or whatever it is)'. After a time, so Savage's thesis would suggest, value without faith becomes meaningless. It cannot be solved by subtraction, but only as an equation, for as he quotes from Herakleitos in the epigraph to his book: 'Wisdom is common to all things. Those who speak with intelligence must hold fast as a city holds fast to its law, and even more strongly. For all human laws are fed by one thing, the divine. It prevails as much as it will, and suffices for all things with something to spare.'

Now Savage's diagnosis of Forster's silence may be correct: at any rate his case is tenable and has an air of probability about it. Yet one must admit that the textual examination which Savage brings to bear on Forster's novels appears to have a certain arrogance about it—one might almost say a certain spiritual pride. For one feels that his judgements are not purely literary judgements, but that he is bringing sociological factors to bear too heavily in his literary evaluation. Of course such factors should not be neglected, but they must be used with a sense of proportion. For example, with considerable care he traces Forster's liberalism as it is exhibited in various characters suggesting that because the novelist is a writer of 'personal values' these characters merely reflect different facets of their author; and in hitting upon this point he is re-iterating some comments made by Leavis in 1938. 'Mr. Forster's style is personal in the sense that it keeps us very much aware of the personality of the writer, so that even where actions, events and the experiences of characters are supposed to be speaking for themselves the turn of phrase and tone of voice bring the presenter . . . to the foreground.'[3]

It is not hard to see at what both Leavis and Savage are driving. 'Ronny approved of religion as long as it endorsed the National Anthem, but he objected when it attempted to influence his life' . . . 'Sir Gilbert, though not an enlightened man, held enlightened opinions' . . . '[His] religion was of the sterilized Public School brand, which never goes bad, even the tropics'. But, after this, Leavis and Savage part company. Whereas Leavis accepts *A Passage to India* as 'a classic of the liberal spirit', for Savage 'the liberal mind is a medium mind'. 'Liberalism,' he continues, 'is a half-hearted creed, born out of stable and comfortable circumstances, in which it puts its main trust, making a gesture of greater or lesser sincerity towards spiritual values—but nothing more than a gesture, however sincere. Those spiritual values, however, tend to become something rather less than the ultimate and therefore terrifying ones. The absolute is carefully excluded from the liberal way of

[3] *Ibid,* Vol. VII, No. 2; Spring, 1938.

life. The gesture towards the spirit is arrested, and modified into a gesture towards culture that, in turn, resolves itself into a salute to civilization, and in times of stress the process of deterioration will not always stop there.' Which is all true enough; which can all be deduced from a reading of *A Passage to India*—provided one is a sociologist first and a literary critic second. However, if one is a literary critic first, and a literary critic who is not blind to sociological analysis, one's conclusion may be otherwise. Instead, one may agree with Leavis that the novel in 'its touch upon racial and cultural problems, its treatment of personal relations, and in prevailing ethos the book is an expression, undeniably, of the liberal tradition'; and as such grant that 'it has . . . its fineness, its strength, and its impressiveness'; that it is 'a classic'. For the achievement of *A Passage to India* is that the reader is made conscious of what it means to belong to the liberal tradition; of what it means to be conscious of the need for background human values, though without spiritual faith. Forster states this humanitarian dilemma as a work of art and it is the weakness of Savage's approach (which in so many other respects is first rate) that accepting Truth as an absolute there seems no room in his scheme of literary evaluations for classics which, though works of art, are not the direct product of spiritual faith. Or is it, one wonders, that this a problem which Savage intends tackling in what is to be a complementary volume to *The Withered Branch*—namely *The Underground Man*? Still, however that may be, in the meantime one would like to ask Savage two questions. First, by Truth does he mean God (he says: 'I use the capital initial to emphasize that Truth is an absolute')? Secondly, is *Candide* a classic? An answer of affirmation to the second question would suggest that Savage could retain his thesis if he remembered that God by His omnipotence can write straight with crooked lines. Since the Fall, in a judging a work of art one must always allow for the bend in human nature; and in that context, with perfect justice and in charity, as a critic of literature and without sacrificing an iota of one's Christianity (if one happens to be a Christian), it is possible to accept novels as works of art in which one may disagree with every word spoken by the characters, including the author himself. For similarity in outlook between critic and novelist is of minor consideration, the major consideration being always the extent to which the novelist makes the reader conscious of the depth of his characters; the extent to which these characters prompt readers to a profounder awareness of the human situation, of the *significance* of life.

At times Savage acknowledges this, but there are inconsistencies in his book which make parts of his essays appear subject to special pleading—notably, as has been remarked, in his study of Forster. In extracting and by linking various quotations, Savage often comes to *significant* conclusions about his authors by way of their characters' comments: but often, as in the case of Forster, he forgets that it is precisely *significance* of this order which the author may have intended shall be inherent in his characters; and consequently many of Savage's condemnations are only re-iterations of those already intended by the author himself—even if they are made at a level when the author's full *significance* of his own character-drawing is beyond his full understanding and has only been grasped by him in a moment of intuition (i.e. vision, or what is really spiritual insight). Such severity of judgement as Savage extends to his authors one extends also to Savage himself, for it would be a tragedy of the first order if a thinker of his calibre should become hoist by his own petard. Even so, his faults remembered, his deficiencies pointed out, his work is always original and never less than stimulating. A sub-title to *The Withered Branch* might well have been 'A Hope for English Criticism'.

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SELECTED NOTICES

The Essentials of Theism. By D. J. B. Hawkins. (Sheed & Ward, 7s. 6d.).

In *The Essentials of Theism* Dr. Hawkins discusses some of the great themes of natural theology: the existence of God, what can properly be said about Him, creation, moral obligation, free will, the problem of evil. The doctrine is traditional, founded upon the theology of St. Thomas, though Dr. Hawkins is by no means a blindly uncritical supporter of the great medieval Doctor. Although the doctrine is traditional, the exposition is admirably free from the turgid language, the horrid neologisms, and the too full-throated delivery that often disfigure the work of writers in the scholastic tradition. The argument is often rigorously pursued; but the language is plain and direct and no one who is prepared to give his mind to the argument will find it too difficult. If anyone should wish to have a brief, simple but not over-simplified, and knowledgeable account of the various arguments for God's existence and of the great problems concerning God and His relation to the world that arise once these arguments have been accepted, nothing better in English than Dr. Hawkins's book can be offered.

It is tempting to pass this judgement and so to leave it. But Dr. Hawkins's great merits as a writer and the expectations prompted by his earlier books, *The Criticism of Experience* and *Causality and Implication,* both make it impossible for the present writer to remain content with this judgment. In no way does he wish to *revise* this judgment. The book is an excellent one and has all the virtues already noticed. And yet one cannot avoid a feeling of deep disappointment with the book, a feeling that this is not the book Dr. Hawkins could and should have written and that it is not the introduction to natural theology that corresponds to the needs of the present age.

No one knows better than Dr. Hawkins that on the problems he discusses there has in recent years been a good deal of writing which has placed the older discussions in an entirely new light. In one case, that of the new emphasis on St. Thomas's existentialism (not in the fashionable and Sartrean sense) which we owe to M. Gilson, he has taken note of this and has embodied the results in his book. But it is significant and, in the present writer's view, unfortunate, that the attempts to re-think the traditional arguments for God's existence made, in their various ways, by Père de Lubac and, in this country, by Dr. Austin Farrer and Dom Illtyd Trethowan, have had no apparent influence upon his thinking. Now, it may be that as a philosopher Dr. Hawkins finds these new approaches to the problems of theism thoroughly unsatisfactory. Those of us who, on the contrary, find them immensely stimulating, and consider that at the very least they adumbrate new ways of solving old problems, can only, if this is so, regretfully and respectfully disagree. But the rightness or wrongness of these new approaches is not the point; rather, we have to ask whether or not *some* new approach may not be needed.

The case for a new approach seems to be this. If we take the view—Dr. Hawkins would probably not disagree—that the fundamental argument for God's existence presupposed by the other arguments is that from contingent to necessary being, we seem to be faced with the following problem. The argument is a simple non-syllogistic inference from whatever we are confronted with to God's existence. For this to be possible it is at least arguable that we do, in apprehending any contingent being as contingent, have, as accompanying the act of apprehension or even as a part of this act, a confused but real intuitive apprehension of God. If this is so, the traditional arguments are by no means overthrown or made superfluous; but there is an alteration in their status, for they are to be seen in a new light, as ways of making explicit a prior intuitive apprehension of God. (Of course, this knowledge is not the knowledge of vision and even as knowledge it is commonly only potential, the function of the formal arguments being precisely to bring this knowledge from potentiality to actuality.) It is only possible to arrive at

knowledge of the Creator if we see things as creatures. Many men to-day plainly do not see things as creatures, somehow their power to do so has been weakened, and this is why they are quite unmoved by a recital of the arguments for God's existence, even when they follow the arguments with due care and thoroughly grasp their formal structure.

If the foregoing argument be sound, the first task of the Christian apologist is not to engage in the kind of dialectic to be found in *The Essentials of Theism*. This dialectic is necessary and important, but not as a first stage in intellectual conv n. The *first* task of the Christian apologist is to enable the man of today o perceive the world as a world of creatures, having the indigence and pathos of creatures. For this there must be a cleansing and strengthening of the imagination. And in this connection one is sorry to find Dr. Hawkins referring contemptuously to the role of art in the work of conversion. He writes: 'Recently someone has described how he was converted by listening to Beethoven, but it is still not clear whether by listening to Beethoven one can be converted to anything except Beethoven. Emotional conversions may easily be followed by emotional reactions, and it does not appear that either the conversion or the reaction possesses genuine evidential value. Of course the influence of beautiful words and exquisite music in religious worship, and even, on occasion, of ceremonial trappings and incense, may provoke emotions which sentimental minds rashly identify as religious experiences. Even the sceptic is not exempt from such emotions, and, if the sceptic is Walter Pater in the chapel of Brasenose, the emotions are very refined indeed. But they are not obviously different from the emotions produced by music and poetry on more secular occasions, and in less cultivated minds they may not be very different from the emotional states aroused by crooners and dance-bands.' In so far as Dr. Hawkins is protesting against a certain kind—an outmoded and to-day unimportant kind—of æstheticism in religion, one would not wish to disagree with him. But he seems to suggest more than this. He seems to have forgotten the terrible truth represented by the ancient notion of the artist, and in particular the poet, as a man possessed by the god and not his own master. Art is not 'only feeling', an optional kind of experience like chess-playing or skiing. The making and enjoyment of art are as much a part of what it is to be a man as philosophizing and praying. These three activities ought not to be separated. Their separation is one of the wounds from which the man of to-day is slowly bleeding to death. It is this separation which makes the arguments of the theologian no more significant than the rustling of leaves or the unheeded whistle of a distant train. The function of art is not to give people agreeable feelings in their spare time: it is to do, more deliberately and more intensely, what every creature can in principle do, though we are often blind and deaf: to confront us with a Presence. Unless we already have a sense of this Presence natural theologians argue in vain, and the rattle of their dialectic may even be an unwelcome music.

A New Romantic Anthology. Edited by Stefan Schimanski and Henry Treece. (Grey Walls Press, 10s. 6d.).

Romanticism is an attitude of mind, a philosophy of existence, not merely a particular literary genre. In Classicism it is possible to abstract and analyse the formal qualities by which it is distinguished; in Romanticism it is not. Such qualities are the essence of Classicism; of Romanticim, the mere accidents: an arch-Romantic like Byron can write the greater part of his poetry in 'classical' couplets. The order, poise, harmony and restraint of Classical art and literature, whether of Augustan Rome or of eighteenth century England are too well-known, too *palpable*, to need further elaboration. To the Classicist there is an objective order pervading the universe, and man is, at his greatest, but the civilizing agent imposing that order upon his own nature and that of the physical world: the agent of God or of whatever gods there be. To the Romantic, Man is himself an absolute—not mankind,

but individual Man. Abstractions like society, or the organized government of State or Church are nothing; the individual is all. In so far as he believes in a God the genuine Romantic believes in and honours the God in him—like Blake; or, like Shelley, the spark of the divinity in each fellow human being. The Romantic is by nature a rebel against institutionalism, restraint, and formalism of every kind; and English literature, the heritage of Protestant England, has tended, since Elizabethan times, to be fundamentally Romantic just as the writings of Catholic France have tended to be fundamentally Classical. The only considerable break in that English tradition was from Milton to Blake—and even then, from Thomson onwards, there was a strong Romantic undercurrent. Even in a period of 'classical' acceptance of the *status quo* like the Victorian Age its major poets—Tennyson, Browning, Arnold—were Romantics, as Alex Comfort points out in his article in this book; and so—shades of the Gothic revival!—were many of the artists in other fields.

In fact the only serious attempts at a revival of literary Classicism in form and content (Bridges's was formal only) since the eighteenth century are two movements of the last forty years. The first, *Imagism,* arose under the ægis of Pound, Amy Lowell, F. S. Flint and others in the 1910's and corresponded to the French Parnassian 'school' of Gautier, Leconte de Lisle and Heredia. The Imagists aimed at exact description, tonal precision, and a highly disciplined emotional control; they paid strict attention to form—even though the form was *vers libre.* It was a salutary movement at the time but its range was narrow and ultimately stultifying. In the end it died of sheer inanition, and its practitioners went their several ways.

The second Classical 'wave' in the 'thirties was rather different. Again the accent was impersonal and objective, but mingled with 'private' imagery was a colloquial and popular tone, and a general carelessness over formal qualities. It was a bourgeois attempt to create proletarian poetry—with an eye steadily fixed on the Marxist millenium as the ultimate goal. The poets no longer regarded themselves as the agents of God but—though they would perhaps scarcely have admitted it—as the agents of Moscow. All their brave avowals are in the Preface to the *New Signatures* anthology (1932). With the outbreak of the war those dreams of human brotherhood vanished, the shuffling of Russia in the war's early days was a revelation to the hitherto credulous, and the movement dissolved. The poets—and not least the leaders of the 'school', especially Auden and Spender—found themselves thrown back on the criteria of personal values, on the need to express the individual not the mass point of view, and to write, as men, of their separate hopes, joys, fears and problems. The Romantic standpoint once more dominated art and letters. Only the two major poets of our time, Eliot and Yeats, remained outside the flux; and it is impossible in a short review to analyse the complexity of their positions.

At the heart of Classicism is homogeneity; at the heart of Romanticism, diversity. And the new Romantic resurgence is no exception: it is impossible to pin it down to a neat table of characteristics. And that is one reason why *The New Romantic Anthology* is more satisfying and conveys a better sense of the movement than a book of criticism about it; for here conscious critical analysis and unpremeditated creativity exist side by side. And because individuality is the keynote of the Romantic, so do a great many other things, too. Ever since the Renaissance and the Reformation the fundamental Romantic revolt against authority has gone on; but only in our day has it become a total one: the individual recognizing no authority, natural or supernatural, social or moral, but the fulfilment of the self and the bond of love and brotherhood in a community of separate, free individuals. This is anarchism *in excelcis,* and this is Alex Comfort's position. That is why he insists on the identity of Romanticism and Anarchism instead of more properly realizing that Anarchism is only one aspect or potentiality of the movement. And he writes here, in 'An Exposition of Irresponsibility', a powerful and ruthless indictment of the world of our day. Yet his is just that

all-embracing humanism of which Herbert Read has shown the inadequacy in his second edition of *Wordsworth*; and Read here makes a wise selection from his own writings, *On Romanticism*, which he publishes under that title.

When writing about obscure subjects it is not necessary to be obscure; in fact, if the ends of critical exposition are to be served, it is essential not to be. Similarly, when writing critically on Apocalypticism it is not necessary to write 'Apocalyptically': this, E. F. F. Hill in 'Apocalypse' has not realized. 'Apocalypse is incredible. Life is incredible. History is incredible. Man is incredible. God is incredible. All is incredible,' really does not get us anywhere.

Writing on the visionary, the fantastic, the personal myth is, of course, very difficult; and that is why Walford Morgan's 'Notes on Contemporary Tendencies: The Apocalyptic School' deserves special praise. He points out an important characteristic of modern poetry—its development of 'a highly sensitive consciousness not only of progress of the visual arts but of whole trends and movements in European thought in our time'. This is an essentially Romantic trait; typical especially of the nineteenth century Romantic Movement: to make poetry commensurate with all other human experience. He puts his finger on perhaps the primary defect of the 'thirties' poetry—its spiritual poverty—when he says: 'The emphasis which had been laid upon schemes for the proletarian state now brought to light an essential defect; revealed the need for the primacy for the things of the spirit,' a need towards which the Apocalyptics and Personalists, in their increasing interests in Berdyaev and Maritain, are feeling, but which they are as yet far from attaining. He sees in Comfort and Read especially 'an anthropocentric philosophy which has all the traditional defects of humanism'. The need of Personalism is 'the theocentric vision—which sees man's rights absolutely based upon his creation in God's image'. This is true. But it is a far cry, for example, from Alex Comfort's atheism. And, in any case, the Romantic vision is not theocentric. If and when it becomes that it will have changed to something else; something more mature, more finally valuable; but certainly something quite different.

Francis Scarfe discusses the wider implications of 'Romanticism in Modern Poetry' and sees its danger of regarding language as an end in itself. 'Sensitiveness to language avails little unless there is sensitiveness to experience, and experience is of no worth to a poet unless it is to some degree organized and integrated.' To-day much of it is not. Stephen Watts gives one of the best expositions we have encountered—and incidentally a bird's eye retrospect of cinema history—of the various meanings of 'Romanticism in the Cinema'. And Mervyn Peake purports to tell 'How a Romantic Novel was Evolved'. Actually, he does this for only one page and then gives a number of extracts from that Romantic phantasmagoria of his, *Titus Groan*.

On the whole the poetry sections are disappointing—and Treece has been unduly modest in excluding all his own verse. Comfort, Os Morron and Spender's 'The Conscript' are the best in the English section; Padraic Fallon's rollicking 'Raftery's Dispute with the Whiskey' and the quiet sadness of Patrick MacDonagh's 'The Widow of Drynan' in the Irish; Sidney Goodsir Smith among the Scotsmen; and nothing is particularly impressive from Wales except the concise and informative historical introduction, 'Romanticism and Welsh Poetry', by Glyn Jones.

The book concludes with three short stories all, more or less, fantasies: 'The Virgin and the Woman' by Paul Vincent Carroll; the (literally) nightmare creation of Antonia White, 'The Moment of Truth'; and the intensely moving tragic symbolism of Michael Sayers's 'The Jew in the Moon'. One's spiritual experience is deepened and enriched by each of them and by the sensitive and discerning introduction by Peter Goffin. He finds them ' "romantic" because . . . they are not unmythical, not without a strain of anarchism. . . . These writings are the expression of compassionate human beings who know intuitively that one becomes typical by being, to the utmost degree,

one's self'. This Romanticism he sees as the essential 'feminine' strain in us, to-day so widely perverted and denied in the name of scientific progress: 'And yet, as history shows, the magnitude of the folly we have committed in the name of God is only equalled by the magnitude of the folly we are now committing in the name of science. We have forgotten that the most ancient meaning of God is love; and that the simple meaning of the word "science" is knowledge. If love is blind without knowledge, how blind indeed is knowledge without love.' In our realization of *that*—and Romanticism is essentially anti- or at least non-scientific—Goffin sees all our hope to lie; and the three stories he selects lend svmbolic weight and conviction to his argument.

The Old Knight. By Herbert Palmer. (Dent, 7s. 6d.).

Poems, 1935—1948. By Clifford Dyment. (Dent, 7s. 6d.).

Collected Poems. By Roy Campbell. (The Bodley Head, 15s.).

Between the birth dates of the authors of the first two books there lies a period of over thirty years; and the changes both in technique and attitude, even among so-called 'traditional' writers, between a poet born in 1880 and one born in 1914 are interestingly revealed.

Now that Sturge Moore is no longer among us, Herbert Palmer is, perhaps, the last poet of the old bardic tradition who consciously dons his singing robes. The word 'poet' is used, of course, to distinguish him from certain elderly versifiers rampant in our magazine columns. For Palmer, in spite of some fairly obvious limitations, is a genuine poet—and if a piece like 'Love and God' makes us momentarily doubt it, there are not many like it here.

The word 'bardic', too, was used designedly, for there is a spontaneous natural vigour and simple singing quality about most of Palmer's verse that claims a kinship, however distant, with Blake and Villon—except that for their wrath he often substitutes a self-righteous anger. Such kinship is made explicit in the poems he writes to both those poets, in 'The Bards', in the Blake-like lines in 'Cats of the Sky':

> If he did wrong he would go down
> To ache and pain and demon-town;
> If he did right he would ascend
> To joy and pleasure without end;

and in his rendering of Villon's 'Ballade of Fair Ladies of Ancient Times'. One scarcely expected at this late day a new and acceptable rendering of *Mais où sont les neiges d'antan?* but, as he justly claims, he has caught the full sonority of the French in 'But where are the snows of a year agone'? And 'Selene', too, has the authentic Troubadour note.

Amid much verse to-day that is, actually or implicitly, without faith or hope, it is refreshing to encounter a strong belief in human destiny and the individual's mastery of his fate, as in the title poem:

> Think not of me as I am now
> But as to come—with mended shield,
> And brighter helm upon my brow
> And arms to reach the farthest field.

This is typical of an Evangelistic fervour that pervades much of his verse; one only wished he would not go on, as in 'The Bard', to become quite so intimate in Zion, to assert that

> Like God, we are not wanted.

It recalls an earlier poem where he once invited God to look in his (Palmer's) books. One has a horrible suspicion, too, that the poem which opens

> Who is this that comes
> With harp-strings in his forehead,

refers to Palmer himself!

This want of a sense of humour, and his conviction that every man's hand is against him often result in a self-pity—less evident in this volume than in most—that is one of the most unfortunate traits in Palmer's work. He probably has been unjustly slighted by his contemporaries; but his often strident anger and bitterness narrow rather than broaden his appeal. Parodying Landor, he can write:

I strove with all, for all were worth my strife—
Nature they had consumed, and Truth and Art.
I warmed my fingers on the ash of life.
It cools. But I'm too angry to depart;

and 'Autobiography, 1949' ends:

Strange loneliness has been my lot,
Deep in my heart resentment's stone.
Something of wrong must be forgot,
For all are wronged who walk alone.

One cannot but feel that for one who, after all, has achieved publication of sixteen books, some of which have sold very well, this is somewhat overstating the case! He is, in fact, at his best when he lays aside his anger and sings —exultantly as in 'Love and Lust',

One said that Love is only Lust.
I say it is Creation's song;

or with the rarer certitude of the ending of 'Ecstasy':

And in that moment I was knit
With all that was and is to come.
Death dwindled, and the sky was lit
With light that struck discordance dumb.

Clifford Dyment is an exact and sensitive observer of the natural scene. His music is of a more subtle and delicate cadence than Palmer's, and his modesty such that when he does write a poem of self-engrossment he has the wisdom to christen it 'Megalomania'. Like Palmer, he is an avowed Christian, but the assurance that his Faith brings him is quieter, less flamboyant and comes out in direct evocations of Gospel scenes like 'Crucifixus' and 'Pieta'—which tend too much to be poetic statements—or in poems where the Christian scene is made the setting for the expression of some personal perplexity. In 'The Temple' (1944), for example, it is the perennial pacifist dilemma:

Whether it is man's Cross to kill, or die;

and in 'Saint Augustine at 32', the struggle between monastic austerity and the delights of the sensuous world:

I crave communion that is not in words
And life fulfilled in my cell alone—
And you, you come with your lips and your gold hair,
And at your feet is a leaf that the wind has blown.

We are sharply reminded of the conflicts Eliot posits in *Ash Wednesday* and *Murder in the Cathedral*.

In the 1948 section the question is posed again with a more personal reference, in 'The Walls of Birth':

Now over the pillow and the bed
There looms the shadow of the priest
Whose doctrine is that love be fed
But body driven from the feast

Apart from two very unfortunate lines in stanza four ('Like a naked electric wire/Is the contact of each kiss') this is one of his best poems. The problem persists, and in 'At a Ruined Abbey' he concludes that

. . . the eternal can only be known
Through what is temporal,

but that somehow all must be fused into fulfilment of the divine purpose:

Yes, all is a sign, the abbey, the sky, the sheep,
For man to live the earth life spiritually.

That is the end; but the means, or one of the means, is always for Dyment, through the union of human love—as in 'Sleep, My Love':

For all the beauty of all life
Enters the room where lovers touch . . .
For the eternal is not ours to know
Long, be the body quick or dead.

There is a good deal of unobtrusive poetic achievement in these pages, pitched nearly always in a minor key; but not all the work here should, perhaps, have been republished; and the order—the latest poems first—makes for a feeling of anti-climax as the volume progresses. If the 1935 poems were to be rescued they might have been banished to the back as 'Juvenilia'; but the growth and quiet distinction of the poet would better have been served by printing the others in the order written—from 1937 on to 1948. The result, with the ommision of only one or two poems, would have been more impressive. And he need not have feared to open with 1937 work: the careful craftsmanship (as in 'The First Swallows') that conveys with sibilants the clogged speed it expresses:

The salt of beaten miles clogs speed;

the felicitous nature poetry of 'A Switch Cut in April', or the Audenesque jauntiness of 'Fox':

Exploiter of the shadows
He moved among the fences.

Yet in his more recent work there is an obvious growth in depth and maturity. He is at his best as a ruminative and reflective poet rather than as a spontaneous lyrist; and he is increasingly concerned with the paradoxes of life. He is tormented, in 'Letter to a Friend', one of his more recent poems,

That there should be so much ecstasy in living
And pain also that living is so brief.

It is a cry as old as the heart of man, but it is newly and interestingly worked out in its contemporary implications in this poem:

The truth is difficult for many of us to hear
And happy are some with a party line or a myth—
But people must come before party . . .

The poet who speaks in this poem, aching for the fellowship of common humanity, is yet aware always of the essential loneliness of the individual soul.

These two books are most tastefully produced and it is hoped that they will inaugurate a series: the obvious next choice should surely be the *Selected Poems* of Dylan Thomas.

The publication of Roy Campbell's *Collected Poems,* the fruit of twenty-five years writing, is an event of literary importance. He has had rather less than justice done to him, and sometimes for reasons that were outside poetry. He fought, unashamedly, on Franco's side in the Spanish Civil War; but that should not have blinded those who differed from him to the poetic power of poems like 'The Flight' or some of the Toledo sonnets in *Mithraic Emblems,* his Spanish War book. Yet the unpopularity of his political standpoint was, in turn, responsible for much of Campbell's ephemeral and more scurrilous satire. Most of it (especially from *Talking Bronco,* and the whole long poem, *Flowering Rifle,* is, fortunately, omitted; and one only wishes a few more pieces had followed suit—pieces like 'Reflections' where, under the guise of speaking of his own 'many selves' he sneers at

The one that joined the N.F.S.
When half humanity enlisted.

Of this, as he writes in *The Georgiad,* we can justly

Deplore the taste, and criticise the style.

Campbell, like Palmer, is often an angry man; but, unlike Palmer, is derisive of those who are sorry for themselves:

And though it is the fashion to complain
Self-pity is the ordure of the sprite.

But his angry poems are the least durable portion of his work; and it is to be regretted that, apart from some superb translations from St. John of the Cross (of which two are here) and some renderings from Lorca which have not yet appeared, the greater part of his more recent work falls under that

heading. All that he wishes to save of it is collected in the Satirical section (112 pages) of this book.

Satire, unless of universal weaknesses and foibles of mankind, is of its nature ephemeral; and things that made us chuckle in *The Georgiad* in 1933, to-day have worn a trifle thin and at most raise a smile; in a few years more they will be of interest only to the literary historian. Others, like *The Wayzgoose* (1928) and many of the shorter satires from *Adamastor* (1930), apart from the temporal limitations of the objects satirised, are further restricted in being fully intelligible only to South Africans or to those versed in inter-war South African literary politics. And so, although Campbell's power of invectives is undeniable—and occasionally felicitous—it is in the Lyrcal section that his enduring contributions are more likely to be found. The word 'Lyrical' is not to be taken as more than the antithesis of 'Satirical'; for it includes long narrative poems like *The Flaming Terrapin*, 'Tristan da Cunha' (from *Adamastor*) and the translations from St. John of the Cross.

What then are the chief characteristics of this considerable and impressive body of poetry; what are its virtues and its limitations? In a period when much of the verse was charged with defeatism, emasculation, and musical insensitivity, Campbell's note was strong and resonant:

> Measuring out my life in flagons
> (No coffee-spoon to skim the flood)

with a forthright conviction that

> . . . none save those are worthly birth
> Who neither life nor death will shun
> And we plough deepest in the Earth
> Who ride the nearest to the Sun;

that, in fact, as ne wrote elsewhere,

> . . . the steepest nevadas of rapture rise over the deepest abyss.

Those 'raptures' were, for the most part, highly personal and found little recognition amid the socio-political poetry of the 'thirties, yet one short lyric, 'The Flower'—from *Flowering Reeds* (1933)—will serve to reveal his lyric grace and power:

> Let no light word your silence mar:
> This one red flame be all you say,
> Between the old and new desire
> A solitary point of fire,
> The hesitation of a star
> Between the twilight and the day.
> So rich the pollen of your breath
> It is sufficient to be dumb,
> Foreknowing, as the moment slips,
> That in the parting of our lips
> The hour has slain a rose whose death
> Will colour all our days to come.

Yet it is power rather than grace that is the outstanding trait of Campbell's work: a superb energy that makes the productions of many of his contemporaries look thin and ænemic. Just as Masefield's long poems receive their dramatic power from their themes embodying some form of race or struggle, so Campbell's best verse displays its energy in the action or movement within the narrative. It is alert, dynamic, and this appears sometimes in quite little things, like the choice of the word 'volted' in the couplet

> The swervings of your snowy horse
> Volted with valour and delight.

The best example, however, is perhaps *The Flaming Terrapin*—the story of the legendary sea-beast that, caught by the anchor of the Ark, dragged it around the world, finally tearing itself free to leave it standing on Ararat. Here is the description of the beginning of The Deluge—and it is magnificent:

> Out of its orbit sags the cratered sun
> And strews its last red cinders on the land,
> The hurricanes of chaos have begun

To buzz like hornets on the shifting sand.
Across the swamp the surly day goes down,
Voracious insects rise on wings that drone,
Stormed in a fog to where the mountains frown,
Locked in their tetanous agonies of stone.
The cold and plaintive jackals of the wind
Whine on the great waste levels of the sea,
And like a leper, faint and tatter-skinned,
The wan moon makes a ghost of every tree.

And here the emergent turbulence of the sea preceding it:

Old Ocean growls and tosses his grey mane,
Pawing the rocks in all his old unrest
Of lifting lazily on some white crest
His pale foam-feathers for the moon to burn.

One more example must suffice—though the trait is widely pervasive—this time from the longish poem, 'The Albatross':

A swift ship struck me down: through gusty glooms
I spun from fierce collision with her spars:
Shrill through the sleety pallor of my plumes
Whistled the golden bullets of the stars.

The other thing to note is the nature of the musical quality of Campbell's verse. The word 'resonant', has already been employed in this review and it is in fact a clear, bell-like music: it sings out; and that is at once its virtue and its limitation. It has, perhaps deliberately, little or no subtlety: it is the music of the carillon, never of the oboe or the violin. The few failures among these poems—except in a case like 'The Festivals of Flight', which suffers from inadequacy of subject—are when Campbell assays a musical subtlety outside his range—particularly when he attempts a Shelley-like measure in the fifth part of *The Flaming Terrapin*:

ROY CAMPBELL

COLLECTED POEMS

"They are tremendous,
Stabbing home direct to
the heart of the reader"

RICHARD CHURCH

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THE BODLEY HEAD

Where Behemoth rolled on a river of gold,
Far down in the valleys below,
The lilies of Africa rustled and beat
Their giddy white flames with the whistle of sleet,
As they quilted the land with snow;

or, perhaps a little less obviously, in 'The Palm':

And the leaves are the wings of the seraph I shape
Who dances, who springs in a golden escape,
Out of the dust and the drought of the plain,
To sing with the silver hosannas of rain.

Yet in their combination of musical power and graphic description there are a few poems in this volume that are as likely as any to be remembered from among those written in our time: 'Tristan da Cunha', 'Horses on the Camargue, 'The Zebras', 'Zulu Girl'—

Her body looms above him like a hill
Within whose shade a village lies at rest,
Or the first cloud so terrible and still
That bears the coming harvest in its breast

—'Choosing a Mast', and, perhaps, 'The Skull in the Desert'. To these this reviewer would add, as purely personal choices, two sonnets, 'The Morning' and 'San Juan Sings' and—as more than personal—'The Soul and the Bridegroom' translation from St. John of the Cross. Furthermore, in spite of the reservations here made about Campbell's attempts at subtle or muted effects, there are two pieces of effortless lyrical description, in a minor key, in that very considerable poem, *The Flaming Terrapin,* which, in conclusion, the present writer cannot omit to quote—even though he is not very happy about the phrase 'twilight-slippered feet' or the use of the adverb 'faintlier':

The winds died down: but music filled the sails
With all the speed and beauty of the gales,
And like a nun with twilight-slippered feet,
Sighed on beside the Ark: sounding more sweet
As faintlier it passed, her ghostly tread
Smoothed the untroubled sea, and carpeted
The level mirrors with reflected stars
That floated there like huge white nenuphars,
While dying echoes, leaning to the sail,
Shouldered her onward through the twilight pale;

and

Smooth as a lover's hand, ere sleep, may slide
O'er the gold sunburn of a woman's side
To drain the moonlight smouldering from her hair—
She stroked the water with her keel, and where
She passed along, it silvered into foam
And burned to take her roving beauty home.

This book is pleasingly produced—though the print could with advantage have been larger and easier to read.

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